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ABSTRACT

These proceedings contain the following papers: "Linking Industry Training with Language and Literacy" (Cassandra Parkinson); "Numeracy: Essential and a Priority? An ANT's (Adult Numeracy Teacher's) Journey" (Dave Tout); "Teaching, Learning and Assessment: An Essential Symbiosis" (David Clarke); "The Politics of Measurement: From Signatures to Significance" (Jane Mace); "Critical Planning for Individual Outcomes" (Marie Persson); "Quality and Learning: Who's Minding the Agenda?" (Nancy Jackson); "Integration of English Language, Literacy and Numeracy into Vocational Education and Training" (Louise Fenley); "Unmasking Assumptions: Literacy and the Fit between Employment-Oriented Literacy and Aboriginal Language-Use" (Anthea Taylor); "Revision and Renewal: Adult Literacy and Its Future Challenges" (Nicole Gilding); and "Policy and Practical Implications of the National Reporting System" (Sharon Coates). Also included are a list of abbreviations and summary of panel presentations by Joy Cumming and Rosa McKenna regarding their involvement in development of the National Reporting System. (MN)

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Australian Council for Adult Literacy
in collaboration with
Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council

'Critical Issues, Essential Priorities'

CONFERENCE PAPERS

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18th National Conference

La Trobe University
Bundoora, Victoria
23 – 25 November 1995

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Foreword

For most people, attending a conference is an opportunity to be challenged, to argue, discuss and perhaps most of all to renew enthusiasm and energy for work in a field that has undergone remarkable changes in the last decade. The 1995 ACAL/VALBEC conference, with its theme 'critical issues, essential priorities' aimed to investigate the impact of these changes on our teaching practice and the implications for the future of the adult literacy field.

The papers published in this book were submitted by the key-note speakers and reflect the wide range of areas that the lectures and workshops covered. Unfortunately, it isn't possible in a publication such as this to publish the original articles in their entirety. While most of the papers have been edited to meet space restrictions, I am confident that they capture the essence of the original presentations.

I'd like to express a special thanks to Heather Haughton at VALBEC and David Riordan from ACAL for their support and advice throughout the publication process.

Annabel Palfreeman

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Abbreviations

ABE	adult basic education
ACAL	Australian Council for Adult Literacy
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACTA	Australian Council of TESOL Associations
AELLN	adult English language, literacy and numeracy
ALAN	adult literacy and numeracy
ALBE	adult literacy and basic education
ALIO	Adult Literacy Information Office
ALLC	Autralian Language and Literacy Council
ALLP	Australian Language and Literacy Policy
AMES	Adult Migrant English Service
ANT	Adult Numeracy Teaching
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
ARIS	Adult Basic Education Resource and Information Service
ATSIC	Australian and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AVTS	Australian Vocational Training Scheme
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
CSBs	competency standards bodies
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DETAFE	Department for Employment, Training and Further Education
DIEA	Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs
ELLN	English langauge, literacy and numeracy
ESL	English as a second language
ESOL	English to speakers of other languages
ILCM	Interim Literacy Course Matrix
ILY	International Literacy Year

ISO	International Organization for Standards
ITAB	Industry Training Advisory Board
LMP	Labour Market Program
LOTE	languages other than English
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
NCAELLS	National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy
NCELTR	National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research
NFROT	National Framework for the Recognition of Training
NLLIA	National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia
NRS	National Reporting System
NSDC	National Staff Development Committee
NTB	National Training Board
NTRA	National Training Reform Agenda
NVETS	National Vocational Education and Training Scheme
SAE	standard australian English
SCC	Standards and Curriculum Council
SIP	Special Intervention Program
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TESOL	teaching of English to speakers of other languages
TNSDC	TAFE National Staff Development Committee
TQM	Total Quality Management
VALBEC	Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Edcuation Council
VET	vocational education and training
WELL	Workplace English, Language and Literacy

Linking industry training with language and literacy

Cassandra Parkinson

Cassandra is the General Manager of the Australian Light Manufacturing Industry Training Board. She has been actively involved in vocational education and training for almost 20 years, during which time she has contributed to the development of public policy on a number of advisory bodies and enquiries. This includes serving as a member and Deputy Chairperson of the Employment and Skills Formation Council, the key advisory body to the Federal Government, from 1989 –1993. In 1986 Ms Parkinson was a member of the ACTU/Federal government mission which produced the report *Australia Reconstructed*.

ITABs are Industry Training Advisory Boards which, in most cases, operate at national and state levels. The Australian Light Manufacturing ITAB is, as its name implies, a national ITAB with a network of six state ITABs.

Until recently I was employed by the Textile Clothing Footwear ITAB but, following a decision by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), we amalgamated with Furnishing. The Light Manufacturing ITAB is a very new entity, however, and this paper will only cover the TCF (textile, clothing and footwear) industries.

ITABs give advice to government on their industry's training needs. Most national ITABs have, over the past few years, coordinated and more often developed new training systems for their industries, with national competency standards, structured training, workplace assessment and new ways of delivering training. ITABs also make recommendations to government on how public funds should be allocated. The TCF ITAB has, for example, emphasised the need for structured operator-level training conducted in workplaces with a shift away from fashion design in TAFE to a much broader range of courses covering many more industry sectors and occupational groups.

The TCF ITAB covers many diverse industries and sectors from early stage wool, cotton or leather processing through to drycleaning, laundries and everything in between. Most people in the industry have no post-school qualifications and the industry employs a high proportion of women and people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

For the past two and a half years the ITAB has run a national Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) project. The project is responsible for a substantial increase in company participation in WELL from around four or five in 1993 to more than 60 in 1995. Case studies describe in simple and practical terms what WELL has meant for companies because, without a demonstration of the concrete benefits of language and literacy training, it is unlikely that many companies will be interested in participating.

The WELL project has also carried out work in many other areas: communications, plain English and numeracy being three examples. And the project has contributed to the ITAB's mainstream activities—curriculum, assessment and training delivery.

Our objective has been to ensure that English language and literacy is integrated into all activities and at all times, so we are sensitive to the needs of our client group. This is easier said than done.

Linking industry training with language and literacy

My original topic for this paper was 'Linking Industry Training with Language and Literacy'. But when I started to prepare the paper I realised that, as useful as the topic is, my approach was far too narrow. It tended to imply that what is important is industry training whereas for enterprises (perhaps also for employees) training is merely a means to an end. That end may be improved company performance or better employment and career opportunities or it may be something else.

Australian TCF workplaces are undergoing profound change, arguably the most significant change since the industrial revolution. Frequently, but not always, the changes are driving a push for greater skill levels in both technical and key competencies. It is these drivers of change that are significant. Sometimes the training agenda seems to take on a life of its own with language, structures and processes that mean little if anything to people on the factory floor. But training—including language and literacy training—will have limited effect if it is not linked to workplace practices.

Kate Nash, a consultant on workplace change, recently completed a report on this topic for our Board. We asked Kate to document the changes that were occurring in TCF workplaces and tell us what these changes mean for communications, language and literacy.

Her report confirmed what many of us already knew. Across all sectors, TCF companies are embracing innovation and change. This process offers immense opportunities for those involved in training, provided they can be as focused, flexible and responsive as the companies themselves have been forced to become.

Workplace change: What's happening out there?

Over the past decade, the TCF industries, like all Australian industries, have been forced to respond to the demands of international competition. It has become a truism to talk of the need for companies to compete within a global marketplace. But the effects of this new environment cannot be underestimated, particularly in the TCF industries where tariff protection has been substantially reduced and where Australian products now compete in our stores with products from all over the world.

Not only are we swamped by products from China, Korea or the Philippines produced at a fraction of the unit costs in Australia but clothes, footwear and textiles at the top end of the market are now available in Australia at much lower prices than they were a few years ago.

Much of our manufacturing is happening offshore. When you buy a suit or a dress by an Australian designer, look carefully at the label. It may well have been manufactured in Indonesia or Fiji. Manufacturing offshore does, however, have pitfalls. Quality is much harder to control and it may take longer to get the products into the shops. Thus, many Australian manufacturers remain committed to producing in Australia. To do this and survive they must compete successfully on cost, quality, responsiveness and other factors. Many are finding that the overcrowded Australian marketplace is just not big enough and they are establishing new export markets. Exports of TCF products increased by 78 per cent between 1992 and 1995.

Australian industries that have responded to this accelerated competition have generally adopted a combination of measures. Typically, these have included the redesign of production, work, reward and training systems. A key objective has been to develop a workforce that is customer focused and customer responsive, flexible, highly skilled and, to a large extent, self-managing.

This is the new workplace culture—and it is as relevant to the public sector as it is to the private; as important to teachers (including language and literacy teachers) as it is to factory workers. Within such workplaces, management structures are typically much flatter than they were a few years ago. The functions managers once performed have been taken over by others in the enterprise—most often by operators working within teams.

The operators have therefore, assumed many more responsibilities and they must develop many new skills. For instance, whereas a supervisor was previously responsible for ensuring adequate communication from one shift to the next (through report books, briefings and meetings), this task is often now done by the teams themselves. Teams may interview new employees, deal with conflict, solve problems and take responsibility for their own quality and performance. They make many more decisions and participate in more meetings than would been have been imagined a few years ago.

Underpinning these new functions is a need for improved communication skills. This is not simply a matter of teaching people how to read or speak English. Workers must also develop the confidence to participate effectively in decision-making.

Traditional approaches to teaching language and literacy will not necessarily enhance these skills. Specific strategies will be needed, but first teachers must respond to what is actually required in an individual workplace. Teachers need to use the workplace as a starting point to design appropriate programs.

Quality improvement

Another major innovation in many TCF companies has been the introduction of new quality processes. While many different strategies have been adopted, all of these require new skills, particularly in communication. Operators may help to write job

instructions or even manuals of policies, processes and procedures. And if they aren't involved in writing these documents, they will certainly be expected to read them.

A key feature of quality management strategies is inspection at source rather than at the end of a process. Instead of having separate quality controllers at the end of line checking all the work, operators do this as part of their job. Weighing, measuring, colour matching and making decisions about what to do when defects are discovered all become part of the operators' responsibilities. Numeracy skills are needed—numeracy for quite specific and practical purposes. Operators may need to read statistical reports, complex charts and diagrams, participate in steering committees, propose improvements to processes and make presentations to management. This is a substantial shift in responsibility and skill. Operators may need to participate in groups but as one manager said to Kate Nash, 'Those with poor language skills do not volunteer to join these (problem-solving) groups'.

Employee relations

Neither do they demonstrate interest in participating in the range of committees set up to address employee relations. One of the big changes that flowed from award restructuring in many TCF workplaces was the introduction of consultative committees. But it is not always easy to persuade people to join committees, especially if they have difficulties with the English language or are unfamiliar with meeting procedures.

Consultative committee members must convey information from management to their colleagues on the shop floor. They need to participate actively in meetings and often need high level skills in making presentations. And they must grasp the overall direction in which the company is headed. Once again, the need for communication and language skills is apparent. Also needed are high-level skills such as the capacity to synthesise and analyse and deal with often complex concepts.

It is not only those on the shop floor who are affected by these various changes. Managers (many of whom have little training, experience or qualifications) must develop a solid understanding of the different facets of their businesses. Knowledge of suppliers and customers, information technology, marketing, quality administration, planning and productivity are some examples. Today's managers are moving away from traditional hierarchical and authoritarian styles to more interactive management strategies requiring sophisticated interpersonal skills and leadership.

The changes I have described are just a few examples of a flurry of activity that has been happening in Australian workplaces over the past few years. There is no reason to expect that the change process will stop. On the contrary, it is more likely to accelerate, dragging more and more companies in its wake. And as we have learnt, the public sector is not immune from change. It can also expect many more restructures well into the next century. If there is any doubt about this one need, only consider the recent decision by APEC to remove trade barriers in this region for developed nations by the year 2010.

The implications of that decision for the Australian economy will be enormous.

What is striking about all the changes that have happened in Australian workplaces is the reliance they place on improved communication. This presents new opportunities for language and literacy teachers. But the opportunities will only be realised if teachers are flexible in what they teach and in how they go about it. Most companies are not interested in running pre-packaged English courses. They want training that is directly relevant to what happens in the workplace and they want innovative delivery which does not take up lots of production time.

Training reform

This brings me to training reform and again, as with industry restructuring, I would argue that we are in the early stages of change. Our Board has become more and more aware of the need for flexibility as we have developed new training arrangements.

First, we had to design competency standards in such a way that we addressed language and communications needs without presupposing English language skills and without creating barriers to career path progression.

Sometimes people make the mistake of assuming that we did not address language and communication need in our competency standards. Such an assumption is based on a very literal (or cursory) look at the standards and it could not be further from the truth. On the contrary, the ITAB spent many months thinking and talking about language and literacy and how to avoid discrimination in the standards.

Our response was to integrate language and literacy competencies as appropriate into all technical standards and to identify underpinning knowledge in the preamble to each set of standards. We consciously avoided creating discrete standards for communication or numeracy because to do so would have been discriminatory. And these competencies are not performed in isolation in any workplace; they are integrated with work.

Following the development of standards the Board developed or coordinated the development of new curriculum. And, once again, language and literacy was an issue of paramount importance. Again and again we were confronted by training modules which assumed high levels of English language: technical modules where assessment was to be carried out through case study analysis or where learners were required to compile lists. Why, I ask, does a person have to write a list when what we want to know is whether they can actually perform a particular task? Such an approach places unnecessary hurdles in the path of trainees. It may discourage them from participating in training and it may make the training seem irrelevant to employers.

Slowly the message is sinking in and curriculum is becoming more closely attuned to what actually happens in workplaces. But developing an understanding of the needs of TCF learners—not to mention a capacity to translate this understanding into simple,

accessible training in plain English—has required enormous reserves of energy, commitment and explanation.

As we have moved from development to the actual delivery of training the issues have become even more complex. Much more work and thought will be needed to come up with practical solutions.

The TCF ITAB is a strong believer in integrating language and literacy into mainstream or technical training. But integration is not just a word. It is about what happens on the shop floor. In an integrated training arrangement, workplace trainers or TAFE technical teachers might also teach language and literacy skills. Language and literacy teachers might work more as mentors to workplace trainers or facilitate practical workplace activities such as documenting procedures for occupational health and safety. Indeed, this is starting to happen in a few cases.

The emphasis needs to be on innovation, where teachers take careful stock of the workplace environment and design their approach accordingly. Twenty years ago at Canberra TAFE College I was involved in teaching literacy through an intervention system. Apprentices would be withdrawn from practical classes for literacy instruction. It worked well and is still a legitimate approach. But I have been surprised to see just how much reliance has been placed on this particular teaching strategy in workplaces.

Withdrawal from the production line is very expensive for most companies and therefore will not survive as a learning strategy beyond a comparatively short period. We need much more focus on skill development which is linked to daily work activities. Designing such approaches will not be easy but if we can do it, we will have a better chance of ensuring that people continue to learn beyond the life of an individual program.

Finally, a few words on workplace assessment

Our ITAB has produced a very simple assessment system with three tools: guidelines, checklists and passports.

At all stages in developing the system we have tried to address language and literacy considerations because we know that if the system is to succeed, it must be accessible and non-threatening. But assessment presents enormous difficulties for workplaces with diverse cultures and languages—so often the case in the TCF industries. How, for example, do you overcome the problem presented by the use of checklists? Many assessors will come from the workplace. How do you sensitise them to language and literacy needs?

Our ITAB has taken, a step-by-step approach, starting with some very simple activities.

As with many of our other products, we produced our assessment guidelines and checklists in the simplest possible language and paid close attention to presentation. We

have run briefing sessions for companies, consultative committees, assessors and learners.

Through WELL, the ITAB will now start to work with the providers of assessor training, helping them to develop training strategies which give workplace assessors the skills to work effectively with people from non-English speaking backgrounds or with low levels of literacy.

The changes that are occurring in Australian workplaces are challenging and exciting. I would like to encourage all teachers to become familiar with and support the changing Australian workplace culture. Not only because ultimately your own professional future will be closely linked to your capacity to respond flexibly and innovatively to workplace change, but also because this is a rare opportunity to contribute to a minor revolution.

Numeracy: Essential and a priority? An ANT's journey

Dave Tout

Initially trained as a secondary school maths teacher, Dave has specialised in numeracy in the adult basic education area since the late 1970s. He has taught within a range of programs in TAFE colleges and community providers, and since the mid 1980s has been involved in training teachers and tutors in adult numeracy. Currently Dave is a consultant and also shares the position of coordinator of the Adult Basic Education Resource and Information Service (ARIS) for Victoria. Recently Dave was Project Manager for the development of the *Adult Numeracy Teaching* professional development package.

Introduction

Numeracy's place within adult literacy and basic education has often been fragile and definitely on the fringe in terms of funding and support. Yet many workers within adult basic education have fervently believed in its importance and in the need for numeracy to be given its rightful place and consequent support. Recent years have seen significant developments and progress in adult numeracy. This paper describes the travels of an ANT, an adult numeracy teacher, through the numeracy terrain of the world of adult basic education and answers the question: is numeracy essential and a priority?

Background

In adult basic education, a very small educational field in itself, numeracy teaching has been but a small aspect and, I believe, an undervalued and under-supported one. We have often had to work in isolation and without the support or encouragement of other numeracy teachers. Until recently we had nowhere to go for tertiary education; there was no research and little published material. Only since the late 1980s have opportunities arisen and resources been developed. The growth and development of adult numeracy has been sensational for such a small field, so I hope this paper will also serve as a form of recognition and celebration of the many contributions to adult numeracy development in Australia.

Why do we as a field believe so fervently in a particular approach to the teaching of mathematics? Why is it so different from how we were taught maths at school and, in my case, why is it so different from how I taught maths in secondary schools? These are some of the questions I hope to answer by looking at my journey through the land of mathematics teaching. In the end I will attempt to answer why I believe adult numeracy is essential, and why it should be made a priority.

Claiming numeracy

I have recently finished being the Project Manager/Coordinator of a National Staff Development Committee project to develop a program for training experienced adult

numeracy teachers. This work, which took almost exactly two years to complete, has resulted in an 84 hour training course affectionately called ANT. Its final title is *Adult Numeracy Teaching: Making Meaning in Mathematics*. The nickname seems to sum up many of the characteristics of teaching adult numeracy over the last 10 to 20 years. There is ANT the insect, often called the worker; ANT the adult numeracy teacher, definitely a worker; and ANT the training course, a gigANTic task!

One of the significant things about using the title, *ANT*, with the word 'numeracy' in it, is because of the almost universal agreement that yes, we can use that word to talk about what we do—it isn't downgrading what we do, it isn't inferior to mathematics. As we said in the introduction to ANT, 'numeracy is not less than mathematics, but more' (NSDC 1995 p. xiii).

The journey

I would like to start on my journey to becoming an ANT. Along the way there have been a number of critical incidents and stages, more than I can detail here, that have contributed to where I am now and the theories and attitudes I now hold.

Playing the maths game: A student of school maths

The first significant signpost in my journey through the land of maths was as a student myself. Here I discovered that I could succeed in the maths game—I could happily work away by myself and get lots of ticks and very high marks. Maths was a game—follow the rules, the patterns, the logic and you could succeed. The teacher and the textbook were the fonts of all knowledge. Classes were silent affairs, work was done individually. Anything else was considered cheating or misbehaviour in a maths class.

In retrospect, although the system said I was good at maths, I know that I did not know why I did particular things or of what relevance they were. This I had to discover for myself way down the track.

No challenges: A student teacher and teacher of school maths

I moved onto university to study mathematics and to become a maths teacher. The picture of mathematics I left secondary school with was not challenged nor did it change during my tertiary education. As a student teacher I learnt about individual, self-paced programs for maths students so that they could progress at their own pace, and about objective, multiple choice testing, etc.

So, how did I teach? I think I was a good con artist. I was a nice guy, a bit more relaxed and friendly than many other maths teachers. Maybe I let my students talk more in class. Maybe I did care about them as individuals and supported and encouraged them. I did learn that working straight from the one prescribed textbook wasn't a guarantee of

success, nor one that was attractive to students. I became the producer of many roneoed sheets of explanations and problems!

I believed that maths was logical; that any student should be able to see the logic, the patterns; that all students eventually, given enough practice and instruction, could see and understand the abstract beauty and workings of mathematics. I knew many of my students were failing but I believed it was their fault because they:

- didn't listen or concentrate when I was telling them how or what to do
- didn't try hard enough
- didn't do all the work I gave them, or
- really just weren't smart enough!

I didn't realise that it was because they didn't understand what I was talking about, they didn't see a purpose or reason for the maths I was expecting them to do. There were no hands-on materials used or referred to. There were no suggestions for group work or activities. Secondary school maths teaching was primarily concerned with issues of curriculum and/or assessment, with teaching methodology focusing on individual learning.

Research like Hart's 1981 British study, *Children's Understanding of Mathematics: 11 –16* confirmed what I had already learnt from teaching adult numeracy students.

- If students don't understand something to start with, then they get worse the more they 'practise' it, not better (one of my main theories at that time down the drain!).
- What students see their teacher doing is 'magic'.
- We often expect students to learn abstract maths concepts at too early an age (Hart 1981).

Understand maths?: Meeting adult students

In the late 1970s I started to teach adult students in the TAFE sector. How could I teach them a Year 12 maths course? I believed that maths was a hierarchical subject—everything was sequential, very little could be missed out, and that it took six years to learn the six years worth of secondary schools maths. Yet here were adult students learning not just their Year 12 maths, but also much of Years 10 and 11 at the same time. This was the start of my awakening about some of the myths of maths education.

Adult students asked why. They wanted to understand what they were doing. Once they did, they progressed onwards. They challenged my understanding of mathematics. Logic and patterns alone weren't necessarily enough. I had to start learning about why things worked the way they did, and learn to explain them in different ways.

Language and maths: Working with adult literacy students

After three years, I moved from the maths/science department to the Department of Compensatory Education, establishing and running a numeracy program. Here the real challenges began. These nine or ten years of teaching adult literacy and numeracy students were the real turning point for my beliefs about the teaching and learning of mathematics. Working in adult literacy I learnt more about how and why maths worked, its relevance and its meaning, than I had in all my earlier years of mathematics education.

The students themselves

In adult literacy I was suddenly teaching adults who had failed even more disastrously than the mature-aged students studying Year 12 maths. Here were students who didn't know what multiplication meant, let alone know their times tables; students who had no idea about decimals or percentages. How had they got to be like this?

The common elements among all the hundreds of adult numeracy students that I worked with in those years was that they disliked maths enormously, had no confidence, and now wanted to do something about it. Like their Year 12 counterparts mentioned above, I was always surprised at how much these adults could learn and how quickly.

As with the adults I'd met earlier, they asked me why? All the time. Why this? Why do it like that? What use is this? No, I don't understand. Why? Why? Why? Then came their response when they did see. Oh, is that why, I never did understand that at school. And off they'd go, onto the next challenge, the next hurdle, the next key to the next locked door.

What did this all teach me? To teach adults who always asked me 'why?' I actually had to understand the mathematics myself. And I mean *understand* it. Now I realise that, although I knew the rules, I didn't necessarily understand how and why maths worked the way it did, and I didn't know how to teach basic mathematics to these adult students. My students did not see maths the way that I did, didn't accept and see the patterns and reasonings inherent in maths. I had to continually revisit maths myself, discover why it worked, and therefore how to teach it with understanding.

Language and maths

The other surprise to me was the role that language played in the learning and teaching of maths. I started to realise that there was a strong, unbreakable two-way link between literacy/language and numeracy/mathematics. I also began to realise that numeracy and mathematics were incorporated into everything around us. It was part of our language and life; it was embedded in a multitude of contexts, not a separate entity in its own right; it was part of information, part of written and spoken communication.

Numeracy/maths was a social activity

I also discovered that often the key to people's misunderstandings in maths was connected very closely to the language of mathematics. In traditional maths classes the language of the maths classroom was basically that of the mathematician. I believe that there was little chance for the majority of students in a secondary school maths class to come to terms with the language of maths or to assimilate it into their own language and meanings. (For further discussion on language and maths, see Tout 1991, Tout 1994.) Mathematics can only be learnt through coming to terms with the language surrounding mathematics.

Alternative methods and integrating literacy and numeracy: Colleagues and new resources and ideas

My maths colleagues

Teachers who were also looking at different, alternative approaches to the teaching of mathematics became an important group. Resources and activities from the innovative organisation in the United States, the EQUALS team, were essential reading. An offshoot was the FAMPA program, the Family Maths Program Australia. The main group to turn to in Victoria was the Teaching Maths to Women Project based at Preston College of TAFE (now the Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE). All the approaches promoted through these groups and their resources fitted in with what my students were saying and needing. This meant the use of hands-on materials, cooperative learning, language and talking being emphasised, and making maths real, relevant, fun and a successful experience.

My literacy and language colleagues

Throughout all this learning experience there was another important group of people—my adult literacy and language colleagues. Through them I discovered a lot about the importance of language in general and was able to incorporate some of their ideas into the teaching of mathematics.

The other important role they played was their enthusiasm for seeing that numeracy was a part of language and literacy. They were keen to incorporate some numeracy teaching in their literacy teaching. It reinforced my belief that numeracy should, and could not, be divorced from general adult literacy and basic education teaching. I believed that all adults should be literate and numerate, and especially that adults were unable to be truly literate if they were not also numerate.

Numeracy out from the cold?: *No Single Measure*, ILY and more

The late 1980s and into the 1990s was an important growing period for the field of adult literacy and basic education (ALBE). There was increasing recognition that the ALBE field was vital, but under-resourced and unrecognised. At that time numeracy was often added as an afterthought, and the phrase 'and numeracy' became a bit of a standing joke amongst numeracy advocates who knew that this phrase would quickly be added on when we were present, and ignored and forgotten when we weren't. Numeracy wasn't yet an accepted and natural partner in the ALBE sector.

In late 1988 the Victorian government instituted the Adult Literacy Initiative. The first consultant's report stated that 'numeracy is an area that has been neglected and which needs to be addressed. It is important to bring numeracy out of the cold' (d'Cruz 1988 p. 42). The author recommended that a small group of consultants be employed to set directions for ALBE in Victoria. I was fortunate to be one of those consultants, there to help represent the interests of adult numeracy.

Those years coincided with the release of *No Single Measure* (Wickert 1989), International Literacy Year, the development of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) and the resultant flurry of projects, publicity and funding. Much of this had a major focus on literacy and language, with a bit of the old 'and numeracy' tagged on.

No Single Measure did have things to say about numeracy. There were the items named as 'quantitative literacy'—another term avoiding the use of the words 'numeracy' or 'mathematics'. Six of the 24 items were labelled in this way, a significant representation for that time of the worth and importance of adult numeracy within ALBE. There are a number of significant points about the report that should be remembered.

First, it highlighted that, compared to literacy abilities, there was a major problem with adults' abilities in the numeracy area. Second, on my analysis, 21 out of the 24 items actually involved some maths abilities or skills, not just the six that were labelled 'quantitative literacy'. This more realistically represents the importance and place of numeracy within ALBE. Third, there is debate about whether the questions were testing an adult's ability to do numeracy/maths or whether it was their ability to interpret and understand the language/literacy context it was embedded in.

This is exactly the point. Numeracy/maths *is* embedded. One of the crucial skills in numeracy is to be able to do that disembedding, or what the ANT course calls 'excavating the maths from its context'. It also needs to be recognised that there were numeracy/maths skills embedded in the literacy/language tasks. It works both ways, which is why literacy and numeracy should be integrated. In this way I believe *No Single Measure* helped to highlight the importance and place of numeracy.

During these years we were lucky to have projects funded to develop resources such as *Strength in Numbers* (Goddard, Marr and Martin 1991), a numeracy partner to *Mathematics: A New Beginning*, and the professional development package, *Breaking the Maths Barrier* (Marr and Helme 1981). With other projects going on in various places around Australia, numeracy was beginning to get the resources and the training to build up a solid base of teachers prepared to incorporate numeracy teaching into their ALBE teaching practices.

Although in policy terms DEET and the ALLP don't seem to have prioritised numeracy, I strongly believe that they have had a very valuable and vital role in putting numeracy high on the agenda. This has occurred because of the priority given to workplace English language and literacy provision, mainly through the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program. Once industry began to analyse the requirements of their workplaces and the skills of their workers, it became obvious that numeracy was of as much, if not more, importance and an area for concern as literacy and language.

Numeracy is now an accepted part of delivery in adult literacy, English language and basic education, and a growing one. Most states and territories now have general adult education certificates that name numeracy as a stream, and the ESL area is also developing and addressing numeracy.

Naming theories and numeracy: The ANT course

One of the most significant experiences for me over the last year or so has been my work developing the ANT course. This gave me the opportunity to do what the course was attempting to do, link theory and practice. It enabled me to meet and name the many theories and beliefs that I had practical and personal sense or knowledge of. It gave support to the feeling I have had that adult numeracy teaching practice in Australia is a very innovative and significant sector of mathematics education.

Betty Johnson, and the ANT course, argue that numeracy is not less than mathematics, but more. It is also not equivalent to mathematics. Numeracy is about making meaning in mathematics. She proposed five strands of meaning making in mathematics:

1. meaning through *ritual* (a minimal strand) where meaning is acquired through rote learning of atomised content
2. meaning through *conceptual engagement* where mathematical meaning is constructed through problem-solving, process and cognitive dissonance
3. meaning through *use* where meaning is developed through use in everyday contexts
4. meaning through *historical and cultural understanding* where meaning is enhanced by an understanding of the genesis and cultural use of specific mathematics

5. meaning through *critical engagement* where meaning is generated by asking 'in whose interest' type questions and also questions about the appropriateness and limits of the maths model in the real situation.

Many of my criticisms of school-based maths have been that it has remained concerned mainly with the first of the five strands. The second strand goes much further than what I believe has taken place in many secondary schools maths classes. Betty links this strand to constructivism, where knowledge is internal and has to be constructed by active learners. This is an area which primary maths education has paid attention to and acted upon, with students learning and discovering maths using hands-on materials.

> 'If we stay within Mathematics—academic maths, school maths—then we can learn it well or badly, we can learn by rote and reproduce as required, or we can find our way confidently around conceptual structures we have built. If we are lucky we can weave together these first two strands, to make meaningful Mathematics.
>
> If we step outside Mathematics however, we can establish wider meaning by making connections to the real world—through use in daily contexts, through understanding cultural and historical origins, through asking questions about the consequences of our and others' use of Mathematics. We can weave together all five strands of meaning to make, not Maths, but what we will call numeracy.' (Johnson 1995 p.34)

It is this meaning of numeracy that I have come to terms with after about 20 years of working with adults. It is very different from numeracy being just about numbers, and it is a big step forward from the numeracy that meant doing some functional maths. It is about using mathematics to make sense of the real world, and using maths critically and being critical of maths itself. It acknowledges that numeracy is a social activity. This is why we can say that numeracy is not less than mathematics, but more.

Constructivism and modelling: Changing practice

I still haven't answered why maths teaching hasn't changed, grown with the knowledge and understanding that obviously exists? It is only very recently that I have possibly found some answers to this critical question.

Dianne Siemon (Siemon 1989) comments on how the system has often looked at content and curriculum areas as a way of changing maths teaching practice, and also at the use of professional development and training. She notes that, as I and others have observed, nothing much seems to have changed. She suggests that we need to look at why maths teachers do what they do and argues that teachers have their 'public' and their 'personal' theories of maths teaching. They can espouse the right theories (constructivism, etc) in public—to colleagues, at meetings, at conferences, in writing, etc. However when they enter their own classrooms and have 25 to 35 students in front of them, they resort to their own personal theories, which are basically the ones that they learnt themselves as a student. So, they shut the door and teach maths like they were

taught maths themselves. Teachers need to have their personal theories of maths teaching challenged and changed.

There is another relevant factor about training teachers—that of modelling what you want instituted, implemented or changed. In the adult numeracy area another thing that we have done extremely well is to model our training on what we are preaching. Most numeracy sessions I've ever attended have involved much hands-on, interactive learning. This models the constructivist approach to learning, in contrast to the delivery of much professional development which is via a transmission type mode. Perhaps this is a way of overcoming some of the personal versus public theories of our teachers, by enabling them to experience how things can be taught and why.

Essential and a priority?

Well, I have come to the end of my ANT journey. In the past I would have used statistics and an analysis of the things we do to argue that maths/numeracy skills are a vital and essential part of everything we all do. But I want to look at it differently this time.

The fact that numeracy is more than maths highlights that numeracy is essential. Numeracy is a social activity, it is about using mathematics to make sense of the real world. Numeracy is just as essential for children as it is for adults and as ANTs we need to spread the message, so that more people of all ages, in all spheres of life, can become numerate.

Numeracy is essential because it provides the opportunity to see mathematics in a different light, away from that of pure mathematics and the powerful and elitist status that goes with it. It challenges the traditional view and status given to mathematics, and says that mathematics in its own right is not powerful, but simply a tool, and a tool that has been taught badly. In an entirely different sense from traditional mathematics, numeracy is essential, a vital and critical element of the lives of all people.

If numeracy is essential, then it has to now be made a priority. We are still a minority within the ALBE sector, yet an increasingly important one in terms of teaching practice. Because we are claiming and using numeracy in the sense described, it is going to require more training, more resources, and more collaboration across a range of sectors. This cannot and will not happen if numeracy is not made a priority.

Numeracy should be recognised as an equal partner to literacy, and given the support and resources to move forward to a more equal footing. All providers need to ensure that they are addressing the numeracy needs of their students. This will require funding bodies and systems, both national and state, to acknowledge and explicitly recognise and name numeracy. This has started with the National Reporting System (NRS) and state and territory certificates. But money needs to be tagged for numeracy provision, professional development and research. We need the tertiary education sector to keep taking up the adult numeracy issue, but for it to realise and accept that the knowledge at

present resides mainly with those ANTs working in the vocational education and training sector.

We ANTs, in fact, have much to say about what mathematics is, what numeracy is or should be, and how maths teaching can be improved. That is, numeracy needs to be seen not only as essential, but also made a priority.

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Teaching, learning and assessment: An essential symbiosis *

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Introduction

The function of assessment is to *model* good mathematical practice, to *monitor* the learning and the teaching of mathematics, and to *inform* the actions of those best placed to assist student learning. The principal metaphor around which this paper is organised is 'symbiosis', a state of interdependency in which the components of a system derive benefit from each other in order that the system flourish. Seen from this perspective, with the curriculum as our 'system', teaching and learning have not derived sufficient benefit from assessment. The separation of assessment from instructional activity has limited educators' access to significant sources of information and removed almost all possibility of assessment informing instruction. Our goal, then, is to reconceive the curriculum as a system of interdependent elements in symbiosis: each contributing constructively to the continuation and enhancement of the system. Assessment must become *constructive assessment.*

Constructive assessment

What is meant by constructive assessment? For a teacher, assessment is a process in which we gather evidence, make inferences, draw conclusions, and act on those conclusions. And the focus of each stage of this process is student mathematical learning. Assessment becomes constructive when it assists us in fostering student learning. For a student, assessment is an opportunity to demonstrate our mathematical understanding and skills, a conversation with the teacher about what has been learnt and what is still unclear, about what helped us learn and what didn't help, a chance for feedback on our progress, and a source of suggestions for action. Assessment becomes constructive when it values what we can do and helps us to learn what we have not yet mastered. Four key principles follow and these characterise constructive assessment.

- ***Assessment is the exchange of information***

  Assessment should facilitate the *exchange of information*. This information will relate to good mathematical activity, effective mathematics learning, and effective

* This is an abridged version of the original paper submitted.

mathematics teaching. The selection of assessment strategies should ensure the exchange of quality information.

- ***Assessment must optimise students' expression of their learning***

  Assessment tasks should maximise the opportunities for pupils to *express the outcomes of their learning*, much of which may have occurred outside the mathematics classroom, rather than constrain them solely to the mimicry of taught procedures.

- ***Assessment should have instructional value***

  Good assessment should be *synonymous with good instruction*, and it should be possible to justify the use of an assessment strategy on instructional grounds.

- ***Assessment should anticipate action***

  Assessment should be developed, selected and implemented with the purpose of *informing someone's actions*. Teachers must ask themselves, 'How will this assessment promote and inform consequent action by me, by other teachers, by my pupils and by parents or other members of the community?'

  Central to this agenda is the replacement of 'measurement' by 'portrayal' as the underlying metaphor for the purpose of assessment.

Assessment has three basic functions:

- To model
- To monitor
- To inform.

The second and third of these three functions are generally recognised, and have been widely discussed. By comparison, the role of assessment in providing a model of quality mathematics and of quality practice by students and teachers has been given little attention. In this paper, I would like to explore this modelling function within constructive assessment.

Modelling with construction assessment

Assessment should model the mathematical activity that we value

The new vision of school mathematics encompasses the basic tool skills which dominated previous mathematics curricula. In addition, school mathematics now includes: the application of mathematical tool skills in familiar and unfamiliar contexts; the selection and synthesis of these skills for the solution of novel problems; effective participation in collaborative groups undertaking extended problem solving or project work; the preparation of written reports of such problem solving; the use of

mathematics to communicate ideas; regular, systematic and critical reflection by each student on their learning of mathematics; the discerning and appropriate use of available technology in the completion of mathematical tasks; and skills previously associated with research, such as problem posing, experimental design, data collection and analysis, and the evaluation of findings. The major part of this new curriculum has not been addressed in any recent assessment techniques. Yet, if we value this rich diversity of competencies, then we must give each the recognition of assessment. Only by doing this will our assessment truly model the mathematical practices that we value.

Assessment must model the appropriate use of mathematical language

Mathematics is a communicative system: A language to be used purposefully, with meaning. At least three forms of mathematical language activity should be recognised and modelled within our assessment:

- *Reading mathematics*: Reading technical mathematical language with comprehension.
- *Interpreting situations mathematically*: Transforming everyday language into mathematical language
- *Expressing ideas mathematically*: Expressing mathematical understandings and ideas in mathematical language

Assessment must model the appropriate use of mathematical tools

Previous approaches to assessment have been concerned primarily with tool possession and occasionally with tool application. But to be mathematically equipped the student must also understand the nature of mathematical tools and be able to select the correct tool for use in a problem-solving situation. A simple hierarchy of tool use can help us to structure our assessment.

Tool possession

Our assessment can tell us whether a tool is in the student's toolbox:

> Find the average of 19, 21, 23, 25 and 27.

Tool understanding

Our assessment can suggest whether the use of the tools is well understood as a procedure:

> The average of five numbers is 23, what might the numbers be?

or even as a concept:

> Using only the streamer provided, find and display the average height of your group.

These tasks offer a model of understanding as flexibility of thinking, reversibility of process, and adaptability of procedure. Other tasks of this type can be found in Sullivan and Clarke (1991a and 1991b).

Tool application

Our assessment might even suggest whether the skill can be applied in a real-world context:

> Janet is Sales Manager of a department store. She must maintain average daily sales of at least $8500. Sales for the first four days of the week are $7530, $8475, $6550, and $7155. The store is not open on Sunday. What sales will Janet need to make on Friday and Saturday to come in over the target? Discuss whether it is likely that Janet will achieve her target.

Tool selection

A toolbox is of little value if the student never chooses to open it. Our assessment must tell us what mathematical tools the student chooses to use.

> It is Andrea's thirteenth birthday today. How many other children in Australia have their thirteenth birthday today?

Assessment must model sophisticated mathematical activity

Assessment must model the objects and the ideas of mathematics, but also the relationships between these ideas. Our principal goal is to help our students develop their capacity for sophisticated mathematical thinking. Our choice of assessment task will depend upon the type of sophisticated mathematics which we wish to monitor and to model. At least three alternatives must be considered: abstraction, contextualisation and interconnectedness.

Abstraction

Sophisticated mathematics involves the capacity to disengage a mathematical entity from a situation, recognising the underlying mathematical idea.

For example: *Simultaneous equations*

> Mary travelled 10 kilometres by taxi and paid $17. Joseph travelled 6 kilometres with the same taxi company and paid $11. What does the company charge for flagfall and for cost per mile?

Contextualisation

One measure of sophisticated mathematics is the student's familiarity with a mathematical object or procedure in many diverse contexts, since this familiarity will facilitate the solution of non-routine problems and optimise the transfer and application of the mathematics.

For example: *Proportional reasoning*

> Task 1: It takes 3 kg of pumpkins to make 4 pumpkin pies. How many kg of pumpkins would you need to make 10 pies?

Task 2: A photograph is 8 cm wide by 12 cm long. If an enlargement of this photo is 20 cm wide, how long will it be?

Interconnectedness

It may be measured, instead, by the interconnectedness of the student's mathematical knowledge, by the ability to change representations, to recognise similarities.

For example: *Linear equations*

A recipe book suggests that the time required to cook a chicken is 20 minutes plus 25 minutes for each kilogram of the chicken's weight. Represent this rule as a table, as a graph and as an equation.

Each of these alternatives leads to different instructional actions. And different types of performance are required for the demonstration of mathematical competence at a sophisticated level.

Assessment should distinguish between teaching and learning

We must recognise that each individual will construct a personal meaning for the mathematics they encounter in the classroom. For example, while 'average' means 'middle' to one student, it may mean 'most common' to another. In the past, assessment has offered a student two options: 'Replicate your teacher's understanding, or don't respond at all'. If we use tasks like 'Name this shape', insight is likely to occur seldom and by accident rather than by design.

Insight by accident

2. Name these shapes.

Savory

~~Savory~~

This example is taken from a Grade 6 class in Victoria, where a 'Savoury Shape' is a salty biscuit. What do you suppose was going through the mind of the student during two weeks of instruction in naming shapes? If you were the teacher of this child, how would you respond?

However, with only a minor change in the format of the task, we are much more likely to access the child's learning, and less likely to restrict the child to the imperfect replication of our teaching.

Write down at least five things that you know about this shape.

The name of the shape may be one of the things to which the child attaches meaning, but there may be other properties of the shape with which the child is familiar, even though these were not discussed in class. It is the child's learning which is of interest, both to the teacher and to the child.

Assessment is something teachers are doing all the time

We have tended to label as 'assessment' only a certain subset of our information gathering and exchanging. Historically, assessment has been seen as a separate activity from instruction, and only forms of activity that involved written student product under test-like conditions have been sanctified with the label, 'assessment'.

Since assessment is the exchange of information in relation to a student's learning:

- a teacher observing a student at work is assessing
- a teacher engaging in a class discussion is assessing
- a teacher talking to a student about their mathematics is assessing.

For the purposes of this discussion, we will call this 'observational assessment', although it involves interpreting observation in the broadest sense, and includes purposeful classroom conversations with individual students (Clarke & Wilson 1994).

The assessment information available to teachers through this form of classroom interaction is rich and insightful. Such assessment is at the heart of the postulated curricular symbiosis.

Assessment must optimise the exchange of quality information

When we pose a task in the classroom, we initiate a conversation. Not only do we say 'What do you know about this matter?', but also, 'This is important mathematics. This is what I value and hope that you will value.' The student's response continues the conversation: 'Well, this is what I know, and I value the activity sufficiently to give it

this much care.' Our response to the student's contribution is a powerful determinant of the way they come to view school, mathematics and themselves as learners.

Consider a conversation in a Year 8 science classroom:

Teacher: What is it that snakes don't have?

Student 1: Legs.

Teacher: No. That's not what you were taught. Who can remember what you were taught?

Student 2: Eyelids.

Teacher: Well done. Yes, the answer was eyelids.

Neither of the students in this conversation may ever remember that snakes do not have eyelids. However both students are likely to assimilate the very clear message that the purpose of that teacher's classroom questioning is not to discover what you know, but whether or not you can find, within what you know, the magical 'right answer', which is what you were taught.

Assessment establishes the terms of the Didactic Contract

Every classroom functions on a set of shared understandings by which the teacher and the class know what is expected of them and what their obligations are to the other participants in the classroom.

> This system of reciprocal obligations resembles a contract. (Brousseau, 1986, p. 51, trans. Clarke)

Students and teachers spend significant amounts of classtime establishing the terms of this 'Didactic Contract' (Brousseau 1986). The terms of this contract are seldom expressed explicitly. Assessment is one of the clearest indicators of many of the terms of this contract. Many of the new tasks finding their place in the mathematics classrooms of today challenge the existing Didactic Contract. Within the constructive assessment framework, it is acknowledged that not only the mathematics must be constructed by each individual, but also the legitimate forms of classroom interaction and mathematical communication. The Didactic Contract also serves to focus our attention on the symbiotic relationship between instruction and assessment.

All our different forms of assessment should be mutually enriching

Teachers need to employ a broad range of assessment strategies to both improve the quality of information at their disposal and to provide safeguards against inappropriate judgments of student learning.

Acceptance of the obligation to undertake multiple forms of assessment need not mean a dramatic increase in the teacher's workload. A teacher who accepts the responsibility

to diversify their assessment practices may have little need for additional classroom 'assessment activities'. All that may be required is the recognition that the information exchanged each day about the success of the instruction and the development of the student mathematically is an important form of assessment.

Assessment should anticipate effective action

No-one ever got any taller just by being measured. Assessment information must be collected in the *anticipation* that someone's action will be informed. If this is not the case, then time and effort are being expended to no purpose.

Operationalising a symbiotic system: Theory into practice

The principles and priorities outlined above can structure our assessment, but we also need assessment techniques by which to put these principles into practice. In addition to the sample tasks included in this paper, there are assessment strategies consistent with the constructive assessment agenda which should be listed. These strategies include:

- the use of open-ended and contextualised tasks
- student-constructed tests
- student portfolios
- student self-assessment
- the classroom negotiation of assessment criteria.

These strategies are outlined briefly below. The examples have been chosen to illustrate the possibility of integrating assessment with learning and instruction. Each will require adaptation to meet the particular needs and characteristics of different learning environments and different communities of learners.

Open-ended and contexualised tasks: A few examples

- The average of five numbers is 17.2, what might the numbers be?
- Using only the streamer provided, find and display the average height of your group.
- Fred's apartment has an area of 60 square metres. There are five rooms in Fred's apartment. Draw a possible plan of Fred's apartment. Label all rooms and show the dimensions (length, width) of each room.
- It is Andrea's thirteenth birthday today. How many other children in Australia have their thirteenth birthday today?

Student-constructed tests: A simple scenario

1. The review lesson

Students enter the classroom and are organised into groups of four, with the instruction, 'Develop five tasks which you think would fairly assess the content covered in the topic we have just completed.' To give the exercise credibility, the teacher undertakes to include in the class test at least one item from each group.

2. Compiling the test

The teacher retains the responsibility for selecting the test items from among those generated by the students.

3. Administering the test

It is difficult for students to see the test as an inappropriate or arbitrary imposition by the teacher. These are the items that they and their classmates feel constitute a fair assessment of the content.

4. Correcting the test

Some teachers ask student groups to submit solutions and marking schemes with their five questions. Others feel this reduces student enthusiasm for the activity. Decisions like these are best left to the judgment of the individual teacher.

5. Returning the corrected tests

Here is an opportunity for the teacher to move the locus of authority visibly in the direction of the students: 'Anne, your group was responsible for item 9. What do you think would have been a good response to your question?'

Student portfolios: A sample

Student portfolios offer students the chance to demonstrate the evolution of their mathematical knowledge and performance over the duration of a topic or a course. The sample scenario given below is one recommended approach.

1. Establishing representation

The teacher must establish what the key components of a student portfolio are to be. This may be achieved through negotiation with the class. One approach is to require the inclusion of five different types of mathematical performance:

- an investigative project (a substantial piece of work requiring at least one week for completion);
- a substantial non-routine, problem-solving task (requiring at least two hours for completion)
- a set of three contextually diverse performances related to the same concept or skill (one physical representation task, one 'real-world' task, and one 'abstract' task)

- a worksheet of five content-specific open-ended tasks (Sullivan & Clarke, 1991)
- a test.

Student mathematical activity throughout the year is structured in such a way as to generate in a regular fashion each of these five performance types.

2. The first five pieces

The first items to be included in the portfolio are the first student attempts at each of the above five performance types. These first five pieces are dated, and remain in the student's portfolio throughout the year.

3. Additional portfolio items

One additional example of each of the five performance types may be added at any time during the year. The purpose of adding this second example should be the demonstration of improvement in this type of performance. This new item becomes the 'benchmark' item, indicative of the best possible performance of this type to date. At no time can there be more than two examples of any one type in the portfolio. Since the first sample item of a particular type remains in the portfolio all year, once a second performance of that type has been included, any additional items of that type can only be included by the replacement of the existing 'benchmark' item. Following this procedure, at no time will a portfolio contain more than ten pieces of student work.

Variations on this scenario could include other performance types, including student self-assessments.

Student self-assessment: Sample items

- Write down and solve one problem which you learned how to do in the last three weeks.
- What is the biggest worry affecting your work in mathematics at the moment?
- How could we improve mathematics classes?

Negotiating quality criteria: A classroom procedure

Step 1: Pose an open-ended task suitable for the unit, and let the students do the task.

Step 2: Distribute three samples of other students' attempts at the same task, and ask pupils (in groups of four, or pairs) to identify the best and worst attempts and to find reasons for their decision. These samples should come from students not known to the class.

Step 3: Share all the things that students feel distinguish a good solution from a bad one, add some of your own as necessary (with the endorsement of the class), and generate a list of criteria for good performance.

Step 4: Develop as a class a grading scheme by which the criteria can be translated into a grade or score for the task*.

Step 5: Ask the students to apply the new criteria to their solution to the problem, and make evaluative comments on their own work.

Step 6: Ask the students to apply the grading scheme to their solution and generate a grade for their work*.

Step 7: The students submit their solution with their evaluative comments and grade to the teacher.

Step 8: The teacher assesses ('second-grades'*) the work to check for shared understanding of the negotiated criteria and consistency in their use.

* These steps may be optional or irrelevant in some educational settings.

Some discussion may be needed to establish a general understanding (and endorsement) of the criteria. The key point is that, after completing this process, teachers and students should be able to communicate much more effectively about the adequacy, the excellence or the shortcomings of the students' mathematical performances.

Concluding remarks

The link between assessment and student performance has also been shown (Clarke 1992). Given the power of assessment to influence teacher and student behaviour, it is essential that we employ our assessment constructively. The principles and the examples provided in this paper are intended to promote the enactment of this vision of constructive assessment in a curriculum which integrates teaching, learning and assessment in an interdependent and mutually supportive relationship: a symbiosis.

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The politics of measurement: From signatures to significance

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Introduction

It was in the work of learning about the processes of publishing writing by literacy students that I began to think most of all about the questions it is raising. What are the essential priorities in literacy education? Which of the issues are the critical ones? I've chosen to focus on an argument which I believe is at the heart of the answer: namely, a relationship between imagination and measurement.

The first Chair of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, Arch Nelson wrote 'the level of literacy in our society is an index of the respect, the affection and the compassion we have for each other' (Nelson 1981). For him, as for many others, the prospect of illiteracy was a matter of social injustice. Literacy and its enjoyment represent a full life to which all are entitled.

Such a tradition of thought is an honourable one: literacy as a right, and, in Nelson's terms, a symbol of humanity's capacity to care. Today, however, I want to ask us to challenge this view, if only to reaffirm it.

Measurement and imagination

Let me start by saying: quantitative data are necessary to the political campaigns for literacy education. I certainly don't want to be thought of as saying that we can do away with numerical assessments of literacy. However, anyone attempting the measurement of any aspect of literacy faces what is, in the words of the Brazilian professor Magda Becker Soares, a central paradox. In her review *Literacy Assessment and its Implications for Statistical Measurement,* she saw this opposition:

> ...on the one hand, the importance and necessity of literacy assessment and measurement, for theoretical and practical purposes; on the other hand, the impossibility of fulfilling the prerequisite for assessing and measuring it, that is a precise definition that can be used as a yardstick (Becker Soares 1992: 25).

In order to confront this paradox, I contend, we require not only a capacity to quantify, weigh and measure, but also to picture and to visualise.

Numeracy specialists know that any measurement requires imagining, whether we are measuring up this room for a carpet or measuring up its occupants for education. However, the reasons the second is more an issue of politics than the first is this: measuring literacy means people—their motives, feelings, histories and purposes. It matters who is doing the measuring—why they are doing it and what they intend to do with what they find out. Within the equation of their findings, then, are also the motives, feelings, histories and purposes of the measurers.

It is not only in deciding what kind of literacy to measure, and why imagination and politics are at work, but also in expressing the results of the calculations. For example, research could reveal that of the 590 people in this room, 50 can read and write in English. This can be expressed in two ways, and have two resulting effects on how we picture the lives of the assembled company. Either we could say: 'Of the 590 people in this room as many as 50 can read and write in English'; or, we could put it differently, and say: 'Of the 590 people in this room *a staggering 540* cannot read and write in English.' We are all familiar with the use of the second in media representations of illiteracy. How often do we come across the first, i.e. the emphasis which suggests that it is literacy, not illiteracy, which is extraordinary?

This paper discusses the imaginative effort necessary to measure three aspects of literacy: the *uses* made of reading and writing, the *desires* or ambitions people may have for achieving skills in reading and writing, and the *achievements*, standards or levels of ability which are displayed by given groups in reading and writing.

For some 25 years, I have been concerned with learning about the interests, desires or ambitions of those who choose to develop their literacy, and the issues facing them and us, their teachers, in measuring the extent to which these have been fulfilled, in what circumstances, and at what cost. For a long time I have been struggling with three questions that relate to this concern:

1. How can the experience of becoming literate in adult life be adequately expressed?
2. Who is to do the job of expressing it?
3. What are the dangers of simplifying or exaggerating such an experience?

On the whole, I have left others to focus on the question of the uses that any of us might make of our reading and writing at this or any other time, focusing instead on the questions of desires and achievements. Much educational research has focused on what 'need' there might be for this or that literacy skill in this or that given context. My question is this: in the accounting process of assessing these needs and levels (or as I prefer to think of them, desires and achievements), where are the chief protagonists in this drama, the learners?

Picturing literacy

What would literacy look like to us in this hall if we took illiteracy, rather than literacy, as the norm? I want to offer four pictures which might help us think about this. The first two come from within our literacy assumptions; the other two I hope will help us by challenging them.

> First, two pictures from a white Anglo-saxon culture, both depicting maternal anxiety about a son's literacy. In both cases, by coincidence, the son's name is William. The first, from a cartoon drawn in 1954 depicts a middle-class sitting room. In the foreground sits a small boy, silently absorbed in his book while another group in the same room are gazing at a television screen. Two women are looking at him with concern. The caption reads: 'We are rather worried about William' (Sillince 1954).
>
> The second shows a different mother, leaning over her son, as he writes. He is signing his name. But, oh dear: he is signing it in the wrong place. The caption, 'Sign heir, son' is a play on the fact that here, we are looking at a royal scene. The boy is signing in for his special school. The mother is either pointing out where he should sign—and so the mistake is her fault—or pointing out to him that he has got it wrong—and so is another mother who is 'rather worried about William' (Daily Mirror 1995).
>
> The next picture, by the Polish cartoonist Krauze, shows a lot of writers. Is this what literacy means? to be in a room of others, all bent over blank pages? They are facing us. Are we the teacher in the room? The examiner? Does nobody talk? It all looks rather cold and hostile. But it certainly looks productive: these people are producing something, on an assembly line of text (Horwell 1992).
>
> And the fourth is one produced by the Directorate of Education in Jaipur, India. It is a reprint from a catalogue of posters promoting literacy compiled by UNESCO for International Literacy Year. The text beneath the thumb reads: 'We borrowed one hundred rupees. We gave our thumbprint on a paper. For many years we have been paying interest. But the debt still remains unpaid.' The thumbprint symbolises a sense of betrayal. Implied in it is the assumed illiteracy of its owner. If we had been able to read the small print on your document, it suggests, we would never have given our agreement to it (Giere 1992: 87).

Each of these pictures appeals to different imaginative worlds. The first, a triptych of conventions: literacy, oracy and television viewing; the second, a variant on the mother–child literacy icon; the third, literacy as factory or prison; and the last, as a gesture of rage against an oppressive literacy. For the 540 of us who cannot read or write English, what do they each say to us? Which is most suggestive of any desires we may have for literacy?

The significance of story

Of course literacy educators must count heads. Students in this formula are not people in classrooms: they are units of resource, hours of attendance, performers of skills, which must be paid for; and therefore accounted for; in accountants' terms. We are dealing with calculations: namely, levels, goals and outcomes. These are apparently easier to measure than uses, desires and achievements.

Here in Australia, despite the pressures, a wealth of practice-based qualitative research is living and moving. For example, ' How may language, literacy and numeracy be integrated in literacy materials to develop with and for Aboriginal students?'; 'How far do labour market programs in adult literacy suit the needs of Western Australian women?'; 'What are the workplace language, literacy and numeracy needs in Holiday Coast workplaces?'; 'How important is written text in interpreting diagrams?' (NLLIA 1995: 8–9). The researchers will have direct access to those two most invaluable sources: either, what we hear learners tell us or what we overhear them telling each other.

By way of illustration, and to remind us of the potential of such data, here is what a woman I'll call Hermione wrote after a conversation in her group of adult learners one morning in a Norfolk village hall in March 1992:

> I started coming to classes about a year ago. Before I came to the class I could write my name and copy my address. Now I feel much better. I like the reading. I like putting in missing words and drawing charts. I have started *Wordpower*. I like the people in the group. I do not mind sharing my work. I sometimes find it hard to read and write letters. I usually get someone to help me (Mace 1992).

Now suppose that ACAL has been asked to find out the literacy 'needs' of the 540 people who cannot read and write in this hall. What do we want to say about it? How shall we express our attitudes to literacy? How might we say what it is we want to do about it? Hermione tells us that before she came to the class in Norfolk, she could write her name and copy her address but, she wanted more. Now let us listen to another. Sixty-two-year-old Juana Monroy lives in La Paz, Bolivia. This is what she says:

> I have never been to school. In my time, parents used to say, 'Studying is for boys, the girls can't go'. That's why I never learned. Now my eyesight is bad, I can't read. But I've always wanted to sign my name (Crowley, 1993: 8).

Side by side, Juana and Hermione represent the desire and the achievement respectively. Hermione says that she started her journey into 'becoming literate' already able to write her own name. In measuring her achievement, we need to notice two things that she conveys about it: the first is the feeling of pleasure, and the second is the sense of being part of a community. These feelings of pleasure and of community, are at the heart of a liberating literacy education experience. They stand in contrast to other feelings—which the parables of illiteracy suggest—of fear and isolation. Juana is a statistic of illiteracy; Hermione of literacy achievement.

Helen Sunderland and Judy Wallis have both argued, from a British context, that the development of students' repertoires for autobiographical writing, whether English is their first, second or third language, far from being in opposition to the 'functional' and competency-based literacy tasks being required of us all, actually provides an essential basis for them (see Mace 1995). Such writing, if published, also contributes to the creation of communities of learners.

Suzanne Power is a student in Victoria. In her account there are two images, both in Glenroy Library. She portrays herself as fearful and shy when she first meets her tutor there. She found it 'nerve-racking'; she 'spoke very quietly' and was 'frightened that someone in the library reading a book' would find out her illiteracy.

> Suzanne's second picture is a different one. She has contributed a piece of her own writing to a book. 'I wrote a story on my schooling and childhood' and, here comes the telling bit: 'and the books were left in the library for others to read' (Campbell 1991: 12–13).

Signing your name

Let me now return to Juana's desire. She wants to sign her own name.

Of all the possible goals of literacy education, this is one which seems the least contentious; of all the promises of literacy programs, the most easy to fulfil; of all the outcomes which literacy educators are called upon to measure, the simplest to account for; of all the measures of a population's literacy, the one measure which is the easiest to count.

> In 1852, the parish of St. Albans in Hertfordshire had a population of 18,000 men, women and children. From the marriage registers of that year, we are able to discover something about how many of those people appeared literate. The historian W. B. Stephens has counted up the signatures and the marks and his data reveals the following. Of the couples who wed that year, just over half signed their names, and just under half signified their names with a mark or cross. 46% of the women, apparently, and 44% of the men, instead of writing their names, wrote a cross (Stephens 1987: 324).

This is useful numerical data. But in order for our imaginations to get working we are dependent on other sources. We need diaries, letters, information about what was available to read and write at the time, and the costs of lighting and literacy materials relative to wages.

The following fictitious example offers us a picture of a scene in a village church not far from St. Albans, just a year or two earlier than the data researched by W. B. Stephens. Two young people are about to sign the marriage register.

> The bridegroom, to whom the pen was handed first, made a rude cross for his mark; the bride, who came next, did the same. Now, I had known the bride when I was last there, not only as the prettiest girl in the place, but as having quite distinguished herself in the school; and I could not help looking at her with some surprise. She came aside and whispered to me, while tears of honest love and admiration stood in her bright eyes, 'He's a dear good fellow, miss; but he can't write, yet—he's going to learn of me—and I wouldn't shame him for the world!' Why what had I to fear, I thought, when there was this nobility in the soul of a labouring man's daughter! (Dickens 1852, 1994 ed.: 417).

The scene appears in *Bleak House*, regarded by many as one of Charles Dickens' masterpieces. The issue, once again, is that of an individual's literacy desires. The bridegroom is 'going to learn' to write from his bride—who sees him as vulnerable to 'shame' at being unable to. The significance for us, however, is not so much on his 'rude cross' but on his bride's. Here is a woman who can do what Juana Monroy has always

wanted to: and yet who is choosing to pretend that she can't. And her choice, apart from any other questions it may suggest, raises a doubt for the historian of literacy.

Hold on to my original questions, to which I want to return. How can the experience of becoming literate in adult life be adequately expressed? Who is to do the job of expressing it? What are the dangers of simplifying or exaggerating such an experience?

Let me now offer some observations about the signature:

- first, the signature, we can see, is insignificant as a measure of anyone's literacy; yet we depend on it for imagining the literate lives of people in the past. We do not have them with us to interview: we rely on linking the numbers of one thing (signatures on a marriage register) with numbers of another (for example, sales of the Bible, cheap literature or candles).
- second, unlike the thumbprint, the signature is assumed to signify to its reader an ability on the part of its writer to read the text to which it is given. When we sign our own names at the end of another piece of writing, we are giving our consent for our names to be identified in one of two ways: either as its author, or as the authorisation for its message.

For those of us who sign our names every day, it takes a moment to reflect on this. Caught up in the commonplace bureaucracies of industrial society, it is easy to forget what we are doing when we sign our names. Day after day, our signature says: I have read this, and I agree to it. When we sign our names, we are giving our agreement.

Summary

For Juana Monroy to achieve her lifelong desire to sign her name she will also have to make her own sense out of a lot of other literacy practices. Should she and her literacy group decide to produce their writing for others to read, as Suzanne Moore's did, such a practice may entail her signing her own text, satisfying the desire of others to 'meet celebrated people and getting autographs' (Terkel 1982: 94). As a celebrity, she will know that it is her visible presence performing the signature that is part of the autograph hunter's thrill.

Our signatures will always need interpretation by their readers if they are to be understood historically as part of a culture of literacy (Graff 1991: 371–376). But for us, as literacy educators and researchers, we must re-affirm what the very act of writing means.

In this paper I have invited you to think about how even the most apparently simple index of literacy—the signature—throws up some tricky questions about the relative significance of a signed name in different contexts. At the same time, measure we must, if we are to squeeze some kind of political attention and some kind of minimal funding for even the most minimal adult literacy education. The issue is a political one: without statistical data of the non-use of Welsh in Wales, the 1993 Language Act might never

have got through the monoglot chambers at Westminster (Baker 1985); without newly dramatised global figures of illiteracy, the arguments for International Literacy Year (ILY) and a decade of 'Education for All' would have fallen on deaf ears (UNESCO 1990).

Arlene Fingeret's 'household survey' told us illiterates have their own networks, connections and literate lives outside the understanding of conventional literacy (Fingeret 1983). Rosie Wickert has argued, if we are to maintain at least some power over the literacy agenda, we must continue to struggle with the discourse in which it is presented, and find a way to redefine it on our terms (Wickert 1991). We, who are the literacy advocates (or even missionaries), must also remember the possibility of indifference. Among the 540 here in this hall who I have suggested may not be able to do more than sign their name, there may be as many as 400 who, for the time being, do not have the time or inclination to do anything to change that. For all we may regret this, we must conceive at least of the possibility that some of them do not come because they do not find literacy education attractive to them.

Our job is to ensure that the secrets and pleasures of literacy are made as clear to our potential constituency as its proclaimed necessity. We still do not know enough about what literacy learners themselves have to say about literacy education. We also need to notice that the achievement of literacy may also mean the achievement of no longer wanting to use it. 'If I don't agree with the contents of the document, I just don't sign. Whereas before, one could never refuse to sign' (quoted in Nelson 1981: 87).

If we are to know more about the uses of, desires for, and achievements of literacy; and measure any of these immeasurables, we must make the imaginative leap to conceive of habitual reading and writing as strange, unfamiliar and extraordinary. Only then may we begin to be able to assess the social, personal, cultural and political significance of being an active, critical and expressive literate in adult life.

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Critical planning for individual outcomes

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The climate for planning and delivering language, literacy and numeracy provision has changed in a number of subtle ways since the ANTA agreement was signed in 1992. In 1992, the literacy field was celebrating the completion of the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy and the embedding of literacy in government policy through the 1991 endorsement of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP). These achievements were immense in a climate where literacy had been largely regarded as a 'social welfare' issue.

It was in 1992 that I last addressed an ACAL forum—in fact as ACAL President. During that address I stressed the importance of ACAL in delivering principled advice—advice coming from a basis of commitment to teachers and students, without vested interests, a role which I still believe to be critical.

I also spoke of the efforts of the field continuing to be on demanding quality provision in a myriad of contexts. This, also, is still a necessary critical focus.

However, since 1992 my role has changed and I speak to you as a representative of a government authority with very particular 'vested interests'—to create a highly skilled mobile workplace contributing fully to the development of the Australian economy. The recent reforms to the vocational education and training (VET) system are aimed at achieving this end.

I believe that the interests of you here today and those within the VET sector are not in conflict and by working together we can achieve both a skilled workforce and ensure the language, literacy and numeracy needs of students are met.

As we head into 1996, the emphasis on the training market and the increasing role of industry and enterprises in the design of VET, creates a new set of pressures. VET organisations and providers must be ready for these pressures. They must anticipate needs and put the structures and processes in place to face the escalating demands on students, employees and workplaces.

Many of us who work in, or come from the field, have seen the trends to more industry-focused VET as a concern. We know many of our clients do not undertake language and literacy courses to get jobs, but rather to increase their confidence levels to rekindle

desires to go on to further studies and, for some, to simply prove to themselves they can achieve and increase the control they have over their own lives.

In outlining the achievements of the last couple of years I hope to show that, in fact, the structures and approaches are now in place to ensure that these clients' needs are identified and responded to. I think we need worry less now than even two years ago. We now need to take up the challenges to keep our clients' needs high on the agenda.

I would also like to describe some of the new opportunities before us. The new focus arising from the reforms to VET is actually creating new opportunities for new groups of clients—such as workers who in the past have largely been excluded from any post-school education or training. I believe the opportunities now exist to make the mainstream of VET acknowledge reality and incorporate English language, literacy and numeracy competency development into all programs.

Language, literacy and numeracy skills are linchpins in keeping pace with the skills formation needs of individuals in both their personal lives and in the workplace. The importance of these most fundamental skills cannot be ignored. Today's lower skilled workers are disproportionately tomorrow's unemployed unless they can develop the range of adaptive skills to retain their productive capacities. Operative-level workers—clerks, salespersons, plant and machine operators and labourers—represent more than half our workforce. They are the half that are most at risk in economic downturns and from technological changes. Many employers adopt 'last in, first out' employment policies with operative-level workers and are likely to hoard more high-skilled, difficult-to-replace labour than low-skilled labour.

In many instances the ability of these Australians to compete in the labour market is undermined by the lack of language and literacy competencies. Before outlining the strategies that ANTA is pursuing to lead and respond to the reforms and the opportunities arising from the new industry focus in VET, it is important that you are aware of some key critical relationships and processes.

One of the key features of the training reform measures is the establishment of a clearer, streamlined training system. The National Training Board, the Australian Committee for Training Curriculum and the National Staff Development Committee are now part of ANTA's structure. The functions of the former agencies are now the duties of the Standards and Curriculum Council and the National Staff Development Committee. The council has offices in Melbourne and Canberra and is responsible for the development and management of competency standards, curriculum, assessment and the Australian Qualifications Framework as it relates to VET. The National Staff Development Committee, which is located in Melbourne, is responsible for the development of staff involved in preparing and delivering VET throughout Australia.

There are two main planning processes which are integral to ANTA's operations. These are the state and territory training profiles and the industry VET plans.

Planning processes

Industry VET plans

- prepared by national ITABs
- cover a three-year period (annual reviews)
- provide recommendations on industry training needs
- inform negotiation of state and territory training profiles

State and territory training profiles

- achieve national objectives
- ensure industry relevant taring
- set targets
- implement targets
- measure performance

Competency standards: Inclusion of language, literacy and numeracy

The first set of strategies I would like to concentrate on centres on efforts to include language, literacy and numeracy competencies in industry competency standards developments.

Competencies are demonstrated through performance. So, if acceptable job performance requires use of language, literacy and numeracy skills, these become integral to the full set of competencies needed for the job. Standards which ignore language, literacy and numeracy competencies fail to capture the essential requirements of the job.

As integral as generic competencies are to industry standards, they have had varying degrees of inclusion in industry standards. This problem was addressed by the ANTA 'Proposals for More Effective Implementation of Training Reforms', presented to Ministers in September 1994.

Following further extensive industry consultations carried out by ANTA, Ministers endorsed a set of criteria for developing quality competency standards in May this year. The criteria include a requirement to incorporate language, literacy and numeracy competencies. They also include a requirement to promote effective equity and access principles.

In order for competency standards to be endorsed they must now include these requirements. Addressing these criteria is a prerequisite for endorsement by either the ANTA Standards and Curriculum Council or those bodies with a delegation to endorse their standards. Work has already begun to identify appropriate processes for including language, literacy and numeracy competencies in industry standards. By February 1996,

the Australian Language and Literacy Council (ALLC) will develop and trial a model for incorporating language and literacy competences into existing standards in the warehousing industry. The outcomes of this project will help promote integration and will be a good basis for the trialing of the National Reporting System (NRS) for reporting adult English language, literacy and numeracy indicators of competence. ANTA and DEET jointly funded the development of the NRS. ANTA is particularly interested in the potential for use of the NRS to facilitate the integration of appropriate language, literacy and numeracy levels into industry standards.

Industry competency standards are now increasingly the building blocks for training programs, curriculum and assessment. The ANTA Standards and Curriculum Council will play a major role in ensuring that integration is taking place. It will also need to monitor the complexity of the language, literacy and numeracy used in training programs to ensure they do not unnecessarily demand competencies to successfully complete the training program which are higher than those required for the job itself. ANTA will also assist Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) to develop quality competency standards which include appropriate adult language, literacy and numeracy competencies.

Industry VET plan process

The network of national ITABs is a key component of the national VET system. ANTA relies on ITABs to promote closer interaction between industry and VET providers. Each national ITAB is required to submit to ANTA an industry VET plan, detailing industry training needs.

The 'Guidelines for National Industry VET Plans' provide opportunities for ITABs to highlight language, literacy and numeracy needs in their industry. The first round of VET plans, in fact, vary in their responsiveness to the literacy, language and numeracy needs of workers.

As many of you are aware, the National Automotive Industry Training Board is a leader in integrating language, literacy and numeracy competencies into vocational training. Their project and model for the Vehicle Industry Certificate demonstrates that integration is an effective way of addressing barriers to access and successful participation in training.

In particular, the integrated model has shown that literacy, English language and numeracy skills can be effectively developed in the context of mainstream Vehicle Industry Certificate classes, provided that the training is relevant, specific to the workplace and dynamic.

It has also confirmed that the integrated model has the capacity to address the workplace reform agenda in a meaningful way. Thus it was possible to meet the demands of production managers for continuous improvement whilst also providing the career structure and portability of training desired by employees.

ANTA will assist ITABs to act upon identified language, literacy and numeracy needs in their VET plans. They will need to link into existing programs like the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program. The types of assistance will reflect the needs of the industry. They will be negotiated through performance agreement processes.

The competitive training market

The third area of ANTA activity in the mainstreaming of language, literacy and numeracy skills formation, centring on keeping abreast of the developments currently taking place in the competitive training market.

The two main mechanisms for diversifying the training market being trialed around the country are competitive tendering and the 'user choice' approach. Both approaches have the aim of focusing training more carefully on the needs of individual and enterprise clients, including those with English language, literacy and numeracy needs.

Competitive tendering has been introduced in all states and territories to varying degrees as part of a wider move to diversify the training market through competition. At the same time, the Commonwealth has introduced similar competitive arrangements in its labour market programs. Some states and territories have put safeguards in place to ensure access and equity issues are addressed in tendering arrangements. For example, in some states, cost is not the main determinant for selection of providers. Tenders may be required to address certain criteria such as the integration of language, literacy and numeracy provision into training programs. Organisations affiliated with ACAL play important roles at the state and territory level in ensuring safeguards are adequate.

Competitive tendering processes can be used to focus training activities towards meeting the needs of specific groups. If state and territory training authorities identified a need for a particular course for people from a non-English speaking background in a remote area they could seek tenders to find the best provider to meet this need. The central principle in the idea of user choice is strengthening links between clients and providers at the local level. User choice enables people with similar training needs to collaborate to obtain suitable training. Clients with English language, literacy and numeracy needs should be able to seek resourcing of training programs that are customised to suit their specific needs.

Under the user choice initiatives, community groups may be able to have some input into negotiations for training delivery of the off-the-job component of apprenticeships and traineeships. For example, groups representing people from non-English speaking backgrounds could be asked to have an input into development of courses with extra language and literacy training components. While user choice is currently restricted to the off-the-job component of traineeships and apprenticeships, it may be extended in the future if positively received by clients.

It is envisaged that the competitive training market will grow. It is important that the language, literacy and numeracy field continue to influence these mainstream activities. ANTA will evaluate the user choice pilots and consider how the needs of individual client groups are being met in order to improve the responsiveness of further user choice initiatives.

State and territory training profile process

Negotiation of State and Territory Training Profiles
State Training Authorities
National Strategy
National and State economic and labour market factors
Government priorities
Australian National Training Authority
State ITAB advice
National ITAB advice (VET Plans)

One of the most important planning processes for the VET sector, as I have said before, is the state and territory profile process. ANTA prepares guidelines which provide the requirements and format for the state and territory profiles. These guidelines require the identification of the needs of people from individual client groups and the detailing of responses to their training needs.

Despite the range of opportunities to report on language, literacy and numeracy initiatives, it is clear from the 1995 and 1996 profiles that language, literacy and numeracy receive varying amounts of attention. Given that resource allocation is increasingly aligned with needs identified in the profiles, it is important that needs identified in state planning processes feed into the profile process. It is a complex process as the diagram above shows.

Each state and territory has a National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy Implementation Group which has broad representation from the adult English language and literacy field. The group often includes providers, ethnic communities, professional bodies, peak industry and union groups and school representatives. The consultative processes have generally been designed to ensure all types of agencies and stakeholders have a role in the implementation of collaborative strategy initiatives.

These state implementation groups have a number of functions including data collection, analysis and strategic planning in the areas of adult English language and literacy, and the development of state implementation plans for the collaborative strategy. These state and territory groups are in a good position to identify the needs of individuals. ANTA is currently taking steps to make sure the profiles processes build on the emerging, comprehensive implementation plans.

Languages other than English

The fifth area of significance relates to the provision of languages other than English.

The National Collaborative Strategy for Languages Other Than English aims to encourage the expansion of adult languages program provision in a coordinated and focused manner for the economic and social development of Australia.

Developing the non-English language skills of employees can assist enterprises to improve productivity and exports, and support the maintenance of community languages. These twin economic and community imperatives have created an increasing interest in the nation's ability to interact with other cultures. Australian companies are increasingly becoming global, multinational operators. As a result, companies such as QANTAS, BHP and TNT are requiring, in some positions, an ability to speak a language other than English.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are included in the definition for languages other than English. Their promotion is the third priority of the ALLP. They are experiencing a resurgence in many parts of Australia. Several TAFE providers are delivering local indigenous language programs in response to community demands. Interesting examples of these initiatives can be found in Cairns, Bourke, Alice Springs and north Western Australia. The Northern Territory has identified the provision of training in Aboriginal languages as a priority in past training profiles, and Queensland has identified several initiatives in their 1996 profile.

Where languages other than English are identified as a priority by states and territories in their statetraining profiles or by ITABs in their VET plans, ANTA will negotiate appropriate responses through the profile and/or performance agreement processes. It is important that we continue to improve our abilities to identify needs and demand for languages other than English, so resources can be pursued to improve provision.

Collaborative forums

The last area I'd like to focus on relates to improving collaboration between the various players in the field. Considerable successes have been achieved over the last couple of years through ANTA collaboration with groups under-represented in VET. A biannual strategic forum may now be an appropriate mechanism to enhance coordination across systems, especially between labour market programs and VET programs.

Forums could bring together a broader representation of stakeholders than current arrangements at the national level, including Commonwealth departments, ANTA, industry/enterprises and small businesses, community representatives, and state and territory delegates. This broader representation reflects the wider environment in which language, literacy and numeracy provision takes place. ANTA will support the formation of such biannual national forums.

Conclusion

Critical planning for individual outcomes

Inclusion of language, literacy and numeracy competencies into competency standards.	ANTA will evaluate the 'user choice' pilots to consider how the needs of individual client groups are being met.
ANTA will assist ITABS to act upon identified language, literacy and numeracy needs in their VET plans.	ANTA will encourage attention to the need for non-English languages through the profile and VET plan processes.
The state and territory planning processes for language, literacy and numeracy will feed into the profile process.	ANTA will support the formation of biannual national forums for language, literacy and numeracy.

I've attempted to outline how the structures and processes that include attention to language, literacy and numeracy are, in fact, in place. I've also outlined strategies that ANTA is pursuing to try to ensure these opportunities are taken advantage of. Hopefully, with our combined efforts we really can continue to meet the needs of our clients and finally make the mainstream incorporate what we know is the reality.

ANTA is supporting a vocational education and training environment where language, literacy and numeracy are accepted as integral to skills formation and regarded as part of the mainstream—an everyday occurrence.

Quality and learning: Who's minding the agenda?

Nancy Jackson

Nancy is an Associate Professor at McGill University, Montreal where she has an established research and publications record in the area of work and learning. She is recognised as one of a handful of scholars in the English language world working on issues of workplace learning from a critical and interdisciplinary perspective. In addition to her extensive academic activities, she recently spent three years in Ontario heading up a major sectoral training council in the automobile industry where she worked at senior level in policy and programs development in industry and government contexts.

I am presenting this paper with a sense of privilege and an awareness of my status as an outsider. I am an outsider, not only as a Canadian, but also because I am not a literacy or language teacher, nor an administrator of adult learning programs, but a sociologist working in education. What I have to say is about the broad social agenda shaping adult literacy and language learning, both inside and outside the workplace. In doing so my hope is to place the everyday experiences of teaching, program development and administration in a broader context, so we can think about where we are coming from and where we are headed.

The language of quality

I want to talk about language, though perhaps not in exactly the same way a literacy educator thinks about language. I am interested in how language serves as a social force in the organisation of public policy—in education as in other fields. Thus, in my work as a social researcher, language is always the point of entry. Key concepts in a daily working environment serve as sign posts to the broader dynamics at play.

In the broad field of education, you will undoubtedly recognise the concept of *competence* as a term which readily illustrates my point. For a decade, the concept of competence has served internationally as a very powerful 'social organiser'. It has provided a common view of the goals of learning in many disparate settings, and a common means of planning, delivering, and reporting on learning activities. In so doing, the concept of competence has served to coordinate the activities of many people from the top to the bottom of the education and training sector, and indeed to capture much—hopefully not all—of our collective imagination about the purpose of teaching and learning.

Despite its successes, we are beginning to hear on several continents that the concept of competence has perhaps reached the limits of its usefulness. Increasingly, we read or hear of the importance of 'moving to a more flexible system' based on 'market mechanisms' and regulatory frameworks which will be 'widely accepted by all stakeholders' and will inspire 'confidence in the quality of the system's products' (Allen Consulting Group, 1994a, 1994b). Both Britain and New Zealand are offered as examples to follow. In this context, quality management or quality assurance systems

are emerging as a key ingredient of a market-oriented regulatory system which will permit governments on several continents to 'steer' rather than 'row'. Thus, in my view, the concept of quality is the one to watch if we are to see the direction in which education is being carried by the current generation of policy initiatives in the education and training sector.

Quality means business

The notion of 'quality' is far from new, and I suspect we all share at least a vague understanding of how it is being used in workplaces. There have been several generations of the 'quality' movement, each one promising improvements on the one before. In recent years, the dominant model has been TQM, or Total Quality Management, which has been widely applied in both the private and public sectors, but bears the strong imprint of its origins in the manufacturing sector. It promises:

> ... to maximise human skills creativity, resourcefulness, customer satisfaction, employee involvement, effective and efficient use of resources, continuous improvement of all processes large or small, and the consistent achievement of high standards of service and productivity. (Price 1994. p. 196).

TQM is distinguished in its approach to quality by a sophisticated approach to control of the work process. It starts off with the laudable goal of improving the quality of the finished product. Along the way it promises the added benefits of achieving greater efficiencies and thus cost savings in areas such as inspection, retro-fixing, warrantied repairs, and the number of returned goods. In this sense, quality is offered as key to competitiveness. In practice, quality initiatives seem to result in a focus on tightening the internal controls over the work process in pursuit of what is called 'lean production'. Emphasis goes into the reduction of 'waste' defined as any element of time, materials, space, or activity that does not directly add 'value'—which means specifically market value—to the product. Thus, rather than improving quality to the end customer, workers are taught to focus on developing 'customer relations' between departments internal to the organisation, and the focus shifts from producing a quality product per se to producing a more consistent product at an ever lower cost. The result is greater standardisation of work and a never-ending process of work intensification. Stress-related injuries increase and employee morale goes down (CAW Canada 1993; Parker and Slaughter 1994).

Such work practices are referred to by union critics of TQM as 'management by stress'. Managers are more philosophical. In Canada, I was once in a meeting with a senior manager in the quality division of General Motors, who quipped that their expectations could be summed up as 'better, faster, cheaper ... with joy!'. Furthermore, as one New Zealand manager is often quoted as saying, TQM is 'a race without a finish line' because as one company improves, so do its competitors (Parker and Slaughter 1994, p. 137). But the real finish line, according to *Business Week* in its 1994 cover story 'Making Quality Pay' is the same as in every other aspect of business—the bottom line.

'Quality improvements can only be justified if they eventually lead to the coin of the corporate realm—higher profits' (*Business Week* 1994). As we will see, this logic has its application in the public as well as the private sector.

Public sector finds quality

Criticisms of quality systems are not confined to manufacturing. On the contrary, they arise in both the private and the public sectors, where quality assurance systems vaguely modelled on TQM are popping up under a variety of names. Health care is a case in point, and a good reference point because it is being currently touted as the model for public sector reform in both Canada and Australia.

To illustrate more clearly how quality initiatives run into trouble, I will relate the following story about a 'Service Quality Initiative' in a long-term care facility studied by a research colleague of mine in Canada (Campbell 1995). The Service Quality Initiative was introduced as an opportunity for every staff member to become involved in improving the quality of care provided for elderly patients. To make a long story short, one 'service quality' problem which became a focus of attention involved the growing number of patients who were incontinent. This meant that more and more nursing time at night was going into the heavy work of changing wet bedding, and turning and cleaning heavy patients who seemed to be less and less cooperative. The proposed solution was to introduce adult disposable diapers to replace cotton bed pads. These would be easier to change and would result in drier and hopefully happier patients. The diapers were referred to by their trade name, 'Harmony Briefs'.

A pilot program using the briefs was introduced but after about six months, a problem began to emerge. It seemed that $60 000 had been budgeted for Harmony Briefs, with the understanding that this amount would be recouped from the laundry budget. In the real event, the laundry budget was not dropping as much as projected, and so some training sessions (referred to as 'educationals') on the subject of linen and diapering were undertaken for the night staff. The general focus of the training was on how it was necessary to 'break even' in the use of Briefs. To this end, a new set of rules was introduced for the night shift indicating what time Briefs should be put on residents, how to avoid using more than one Brief per resident per night and how to minimise the amount of additional wet laundry generated.

Now, the night nursing staff were not at all happy with these developments, and they did not think it was consistent with what they had been promised about the Service Quality Initiative. They did not think the new rules resulted in better 'customer service' and they certainly did not think the new rules, handed down to night staff by a team of decision makers on day shift, were consistent with management's promises that every staff member was to be involved in a meaningful way improving delivery of care. What they saw instead was that in the interest of cost control, decisions about how to nurse—previously made at the bedside, determined by the immediate situation—were being replaced by inflexible rules handed down from above. All this in the name of 'quality'.

The contradictions evident in this story are to be found almost everywhere in health care reform in Canada today, and I expect we are not alone. Critics point to a consistent pattern in use of the language of 'quality' and 'care' to name campaigns of reform that result in a reduction of both. The obvious question arises. If 'quality' initiatives in health care are not about quality of patient care, then what are they about?

In Canada, it is becoming increasingly apparent that quality initiatives in health care are part of the machinery of privatisation and marketisation of public sector services required as fair trading practices under the North American Free Trade Agreement. Similar effects are occurring incrementally in education, social services and cultural industries as well as communications, transportation and the financial sector. These mechanisms are the closest Canadian equivalent to the Australian *Trade Practices Act* and the National Competition Policy meant to introduce 'universal and uniformly applied rules of market conduct' across all jurisdictions and sectors of the economy. But since in either Canada or Australia, the link between quality initiatives and marketisation may still not be entirely obvious, let me move on to discuss briefly another form of quality initiative that makes this connection more starkly apparent.

ISO quality systems

These days more and more talk about quality centres on a system referred to as ISO. ISO stands for the International Organization for Standards in Geneva, Switzerland. It comprised of 91 nations including Australia and Canada. In 1987 it published the ISO 9000 series of international standards for quality management under which individual firms can achieve certification. The certification demonstrates the capability of a supplier to control its internal processes in such a way that they reliably produce an acceptable product. The principles on which the system works are very simple and are often summarised as 'Document what you do; do what you document; produce the quality of product you say you will.' Getting and staying registered with ISO is often reported to be time consuming and costly. It involves a very exacting process of documentation of procedures, a detailed on-site 'certification audit' to compare documents with actual practices, and recurring 'compliance audits' every three years (Rabbit and Bergh 1994). Talk to those who have been through it and they will respond with much gnashing of teeth and wringing of hands.

The driving force for the ISO system of quality assurance is internationalisation. It is often referred to as a company 'passport' to doing business in international markets. It is enforced by market mechanisms, which means that corporate or government purchasing departments simply let it be known that companies wanting to do business with them will either become certified or be dropped from their list of suppliers. In principle, it is a quite simple and effective way to get compliance, but in practice the outcomes have been quite uneven.

Now, the key point to understand here is that ISO does not set product standards and so does not guarantee a superior product. Rather, it is a process control system, concerned with setting and enforcing minimum standard procedures. It is concerned with acceptability and consistency, not excellence. It focuses on approximately 20 dimensions of production control, including purchasing, inspecting, handling, storage, packaging, training, document and data control, etc. It does not set standards for many elements of production process in which the public might have an interest. For example, though I have not examined how ISO standards are interpreted and applied in Australia, I can tell you that in Canada, ISO certification does not involve attention to environmental standards, safety standards or labour standards.

These silences are cause for some concern. Together with the growing understanding that ISO is not concerned with product quality, per se, they are the basis for growing debate, even disillusionment with the system (Anderson 1995). The European Economic Community is reported to be pulling away from ISO standards on the basis that they are costly, time consuming, bureaucratic and inflexible and not always associated with quality outcomes. Labour unions argue that the standards don't satisfy their concerns because there is nothing in the standards that would prevent a virtual sweatshop from achieving certification. Even some American management leaders are becoming critics. Business author, Tom Peters in his latest book, *The Pursuit of Wow* quotes the Chief Executive Officer of Motorola as saying the difficulty with ISO 9000 is that you could produce cement life jackets (!) with ISO blessings as long as the procedures for doing so were documented and consistent (Anderson 1995).

So, it turns out that the concept of 'quality' itself can't be taken at face value, even though it looks like an honest, trustworthy and commonsense word. Upon closer examination, neither TQM nor ISO turns out to be precisely about achieving high quality results. Instead, they are concerned with instituting various kinds of documentary control systems that will let agencies outside of the workplace, whether government funding bodies or transnational corporations, decide whether a given supplier or provider of service is a reliable place to do business. Thus, these mechanisms are part of a pervasive agenda of privatisation, marketisation and internationalisation of local and regional economies. So, like the notion of competence before it, the word *quality* turns out to serve as a social organiser. It provides a framework for each of us to arrange our daily working lives according to the dictates of the global marketplace. But calling it 'quality assurance' means we are all ready to believe in it. In this way, quality systems satisfy the criteria for a regulatory mechanism that is widely acceptable and confidence inspiring.

All this might not be so bad, of course, if the outcomes of all these efforts were actually better quality products and a higher quality of working life. But the evidence in this regard is not convincing, even from the point of view of business and industry. If we look at the track record of quality initiatives in North America, or in Japan where they originate, we find the same pattern: they are introduced with great optimism, they

struggle along for a few years amidst some controversy, and then they tend to flicker and fail, leaving disillusionment in their path. Companies are disillusioned because these initiatives turn out to be expensive, cumbersome and often fail to make the kind of difference they promised. Workers are disillusioned because they feel their goodwill is being exploited while their work practices are increasingly constrained and their health increasingly compromised. What workers understand about providing a 'quality' product or service is not the outcome of these programs.

In an article entitled 'Does Quality Crush Innovation?' Sharon Bates, the general manager of a Sydney firm, argues that the quality concept is not just about commitment to excellence. It is about commitment to a systems approach that strives for homogeneity and the elimination of variation. This, she says, is not for people and not good for business, particularly if innovation and change are our goals. She makes a clear plea about education in this context:

> In education, people learn at different rates in different ways. We must actually cater for these variations, not try to eliminate them! ... That is what innovation is about. That is not what quality systems are about—but we should not lose sight of a commitment to excellence because the branding and accreditation of quality has got it all wrong! (Bates 1995, p. 26).

So, if Sharon Bates is right, and the business community has 'got it all wrong' when defining the meaning of quality, then the challenge to us is to do better, and the moment to do so in now. The question is, where would we start?

Reclaiming quality for learners

Evidence is that the quality agenda is here to stay, both in Canada and Australia. We will not defeat it with footdragging and naysaying, nor with critiques of its failings, however scathing or clever. The challenge to those of us who are concerned about its impact in our sector is to mobilise in the coming months to reclaim and reshape the agenda, to adapt it to goals we can believe in and support as educators.

To do this we face quite different challenges depending on how and where we work. First, let me say a little about the work we can do as administrators and developers of programs and their infrastructure, whether in providers or in government. Second I will look to the frontlines of teaching and learning for a sense of vision and direction. In either case, I can only suggest some tentative starting places and a sense of direction, and leave it to you to identify the specific opportunities to act strategically in your own working lives.

As administrators, we need to remember that quality programs do not arrive from nowhere and land fully formed on our desks. Rather, their local applications in any sector are being written and developed in the places where we work, and there is considerable opportunity to influence how the model will actually be applied. This means a chance to maximise its potential for good effects and limit, or at least frustrate, the negative effects as best we can. To do this we need to assume some leadership, take

every opportunity to educate, to question, to broaden debate. At the risk of making a nuisance of ourselves, we need to use every committee we sit on, every decision-making process we are involved in, every briefing we write, every performance agreement we draft, etc. as an opportunity to increase the awareness—and stretch the imagination—of others around us about what quality might mean in our field, and how the idea of quality assurance might serve our goals. Then we need to build our own ideas, principles and values into the regulatory framework for quality assurance which we are being required to adopt, so the agenda to which our organisations will be held accountable is, as far as possible, our own.

To pursue our own agenda, of course, means we need our own goals for the future, and this is never simple. There is not universal agreement on the 'coin of the realm' for adult educators as there is for the business community. Still, we are not without our visionaries, especially if we take our clues from people who are at the front lines of teaching and learning in the classroom. It is always a pleasure and a privilege for me to read the Australian literature where I find a particularly vibrant, creative and innovative vision of adult learning, particularly in the context of work-based programs. So, in a moment, I would like to reflect back to you the words and ideas of several of your own colleagues from whom I have borrowed shamelessly in attempting to think about our own quality agenda. I apologise here for my Victoria-centred perspective which is the result of drawing on what was close at hand.

The promise and challenge of defining our own agenda was highlighted for me at this conference in the presentation of Cassandra Parkinson. She drew our attention to the growing complexity of workplaces, and to the growing necessity to compile, synthesise, analyse and utilise complex information in the workplace environment—not just charts and graphs though these are indeed basic tools of quality control and assurance—but information of many kinds. In listening to Cassandra, my own thoughts were drawn to the problem of 'Newspeak' in workplaces and to the problem of literacies in this context. I thought of the confounding effect for literacy and second-language learners of initiatives like 'quality assurance' where language is used in ways that are a subtle assault on the mind because words don't quite mean what they appear to mean.

So, for teachers, the quality movement confronts us again with the pervasively political nature of language in workplaces, and in turn the irremediably political character of our work as educators. Much excellent work on the political dilemmas of workplace learning has been written or edited by Mike Brown, and in particular I refer you to a recent collection entitled *Literacies and the Workplace* (Brown 1994). In that book is a paper by Crina Virgona which gives one of the best close-up accounts I have ever seen of the politics of workplace learning. Crina challenges us to examine very compelling questions: Whose language are we teaching? Will we encourage forms of language use that emulate, reproduce the dominant workplace culture? Will our teaching practices encourage a challenge, the development of an alternate voice? Is part of workplace literacy the need to understand the nexus between power and language? In all these

ways, whose interests are we serving, and who is our client? These are time honoured questions for many language and literacy teachers, in the workplace as well as in the community. The answers to all of these questions might be part of our own agenda for quality in learning.

A related set of questions focuses on the social and organisational realities of workplaces as sites of learning and change. These issues are sensitively explored in a report to the National Automotive Industry Training Board entitled *Breathing Life into Training* (Sefton et al eds 1994). The recommendations of this report remind us to value linguistic and cultural diversity as a positive force in the workplace as well as the classroom. They remind us of the power of collaborative, experiential and action learning to enhance not only individual learning but also workplace culture. They point to the value of integrating literacy and basic education into other forms of workplace training so that basic skills are available to all and learnt in their broad industrial and social contexts. They argue that a quality learning program includes research and professional development in order to sustain and improve itself. All of these elements might be part of our own quality agenda.

In addition to these resources which focus on work-based learning in particular, I want to draw your attention briefly to one study of community-based programs which I feel has enormous potential to feed our imaginations about questions of quality in learning, whatever the program setting. The report is called *Multiple Images, Common Threads* (Bradshaw 1995). It was prepared by Delia Bradshaw for the Adult Community and Further Education Board in Victoria, and provides a richly detailed description of ten programs which offer exemplary models of adults learning in a wide range of programs and contexts. It describes quality learning processes as ones that are 'intricately textured ... multi-dimensional ... multi-purpose ... multi-disciplinary ... [and] multi-faceted' in content, method and form. It calls for learning that is 'participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary, activist'. It praises learning that 'embodies the concept of community' rather than treating learning as a 'commercial exchange between buyers and suppliers.' It quotes the Koori community as seeking learning situations that value the quality of the relationships upon which the program is based, including humour, understanding, compassion and sincerity. All these are characteristics of what Delia calls truly 'value added' education. Are there any good reasons not to pursue these values as elements of quality learning in the workplace as much as in the community?

So my message is that any quality agenda worth our support and our confidence will not only be about standardised procedures. It must also be about values and visions of the kind of workplaces, and the kind of society, we want to build. Visions are not standardised, but diverse and sometimes contradictory. So in the end, the pursuit of quality brings us face to face with the dilemma captured in these words of Crina Virgona:

> We may chose to ignore it, but in reality, our work is at the heart of political and cultural struggle of our society (Virgona 1994 p. 146).

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Integration of English language, literacy and numeracy into vocational education and training

Louise Fenley

After careers in social work and high school English teaching, Louise joined NSW TAFE in 1974. She taught in Welfare Work courses and was Outreach Coordinator for community access programs. She became State Manager of Foundation Studies Training Division in 1991 where she is responsible for state-wide curriculum and professional development in adult literacy, numeracy, ESOL, Outreach and Local Government courses. She has had life-long involvement with access and equity issues and more recently in the importance of literacy, numeracy and English language skills to vocational training and work competencies.

For some years, TAFE NSW Foundation Studies Training Division members have been concerned with improving the outcomes of vocational TAFE courses through providing language, literacy and numeracy support to those who need it, and through sharpening the relevance of work and living contexts for English language, literacy and numeracy stand-alone teaching programs.

We started to talk more in terms of vocational education and the improvement of English language, literacy and numeracy (ELLN) skills as being integral to each other. Without the necessary reading and writing skills to understand classroom material, complete assessments etc., students in vocational courses may fail, withdraw or repeat; and without a firm purpose for the uses to which English language, literacy and numeracy skills need to be put—the context—the ELLN teaching can be too general.

The strategy of integrating the two in more structured ways was embedded in the *National Collaborative English Language and Literacy Strategy*. In 1994, the Foundation Studies Training Division successfully tendered for an ALLP national project to develop a framework for integrating English language, literacy and numeracy with vocational education and training (VET). In this paper I will use the work of this project to discuss integration and the issues surrounding it.

A definition

The integration framework report defines integration as follows:

> Integrating English language, literacy and numeracy into vocational education and training involves concurrently developing language, literacy and numeracy and vocational competencies as interrelated elements of the one process. This involves designing and delivering programs which meet the skills requirements of the job or occupation, and which are responsive to the diversity of learners' skills, requirements and resources (Courtenay & Mawer 1995, p. 13).

Integrated programs have four characteristics (Courtenay & Mawer 1995):

- They identify the English language, literacy and numeracy skills that are necessary for work performance.

- They identify English language, literacy and numeracy skills of learners and develop them as part of vocational skills development.
- They ensure English language, literacy and numeracy skills required in training are consistent with skills required for the job.
- They assess language, literacy and numeracy outcomes in terms of successful performance of relevant vocational tasks.

You can see that there is nothing particularly new or different in this. Rather, it is an extension of what good ELLN practitioners always do: teach to the students' needs, within the context that makes sense to the students, with the outcomes being to achieve the students' goals.

Why integrated programs? When to use them?

Contextualising ELLN teaching always makes sense. However, the degree to which we apply the integrated models depends on the context and purpose of the program. They are most applicable in training that is specifically job-related, and where the focus of the course is training for, or on, the job.

The workplace training of existing workers is the most obvious example. Changes in industrial practices, such as working in teams, quality processes, increasing use of technology, and formal training for everyone in the workforce, has meant changing demands on people's literacy skills, and there is now formal training for new groups of workers for whom training has never before existed.

Putting such adults, usually perfectly competent at their jobs, into separate literacy classes before they access work skills training, is inefficient, demeaning, costly and not conducive to the overall team-based, shared-responsibility approach being engendered in today's workplaces. Providing the literacy skills they need, simply as part of the skills training for the job, makes sense to everyone.

The second example is people undertaking vocational preparation off the job, as preparation for employment (for example, TAFE courses or traineeships). Many of the same principles apply.

In the past, such students may have been tested before selection (trades test) and then succeeded or not in their courses, according to their own effort. Many dropped out altogether, or failed and repeated. At least some of their difficulty was because the literacy demands of training outstripped the students' skills (and often outstripped the needs of the job.)

The clever country, and increasingly financially strapped institutions, can't afford this. It is a the waste of resources. The recognition of current competencies and competency-based training demand a new approach. We need to ensure that people are studying courses that are appropriate to them, and then to ensure that they have the maximum opportunity to succeed in, to acquire and demonstrate vocational competencies.

There are still, of course, a wide range of students who are not enrolled in vocational courses and do not have a specific vocational aim but who feel they need to improve their literacy skills, are non-job seekers or are referred by CES. For these students, no particular vocational context has been defined. I want to stress that I do not wish to undervalue the crucial importance of such courses.

But, of course, 'general' literacy does not go far in meeting anyone's need, without a narrowing of the focus on what do they wish to read, what they need to write for daily life, and so on. And increasingly, curriculum frameworks are being developed for these programs which allow not just such identification of contextual need, but which also include a range of vocational electives which allow students to try some other training options. Such programs are increasingly accepted for SIP (Special Intervention Program) by CES because of their employment-related focus.

Issues arising

Changing attitudes

It is not easy to introduce change. All of us prefer to stick to the ways we know. Our experience is that it is not easy to convince our vocational colleagues of the importance of including ELLN considerations in curriculum development. They see the need for 'remedial help' for some students, but we have not yet been able to demonstrate clearly to them the relevance of a whole-of-course approach.

Teachers—both ELLN and VET— do not always find it easy to share a classroom in team teaching or to consult with each other about teaching strategies. It is not easy to relinquish control in your own area of expertise.

Employers have the model of how we all learnt at school—learn reading and writing first, then other things. They are not often easily convinced to try another way until they see the results.

Policy

Many policies reflect the front-end model, or do not consider ELLN at all, although this is changing. Some important policy issues are listed below.

The Special Intervention Program

The Commonwealth Government has to be applauded for the serious attention and resource injection to literacy through the ALLP in the past four years. If we compare the situation five or six years ago to now, we should be astonished at the changes.

However, the SIP supports a front-end approach, and many teachers will have experienced somewhat reluctant learners referred by the CES for literacy classes when they want a job. Integrated training, where they are referred instead for job training,

makes more sense to them, particularly those whose school experience was less than satisfactory, or who have already been in the workforce. However, DEET is interested in the integrated approach, and I hope we will see this increasingly reflected in SIP policy.

WELL

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program has been the most significant factor in changing workplace experience of training needs related to ELLN. However, when WELL was introduced, there was a clear indication that DEET needed clear accountability measures, and the early stages of the program insisted on the reporting of individual workers participating in WELL programs and wanting some accounting for individual student progress. More recently, WELL guidelines have moved to incorporate an integrated approach, particularly as feedback from employers has been more positive. We need to support and extend this approach.

Standards development

The ideal beginning for the consideration of literacy needs in vocational program development would be the identification, in some way, of the ELLN implications or requirements within the industry competency standards. There has been a long debate about the advisability of making these needs explicit, but so far we have a situation where they are largely ignored altogether. This has not promoted the consideration of literacy needs as part of the development of vocational competency. There is currently a research project underway, under the auspice of the Australian Language and Literacy Council (ALLC), to examine how ELLN needs may best be addressed in the development of competency standards, and how the National Reporting System (NRS) can inform the process, and we will watch the outcome of this project with great interest.

The latest guidelines to competency standards bodies (CSBs) from the new Standards and Curriculum Council of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) require CSBs to consider literacy requirements as part of the standards development process which is very good news. The difficulty is that the wording of these guidelines has ELLN competencies included in the key competencies.

Key competencies

There has been very little consideration, at this stage, of the relationship between language, literacy and numeracy competencies and the Mayer key competencies. There seems to be an assumption on the part of some people and bodies that they have been included automatically, while it is fairly clear to most of us working in the area that they have not really been considered at all. It is quite urgent that we address this issue through research and development of strategies if ELLN needs are not to be swept away in that general assumption that they have already been attended to.

AVTS

The systemic review of the first Australian Vocational Training Scheme (AVTS) pilots in 1994 identified ELLN as an issue in every one of the pilots that had been run, even where students had been selected individually. Strangely, this finding was not highlighted in the report, but included almost as an aside. It indicates how far we still have to go in convincing our systems that ELLN skills is a key issue in the national training reforms.

The guidelines for the AVTS conversion program include considerations of access and equity and key competencies, and there seems to be an assumption that this will mean that vocational curriculum developers and enterprises will automatically include consideration of ELLN issues as part of this.

This has not been our experience so far. In New South Wales we have managed to have an ELLN consultancy involved in each of the AVTS pilot programs developed through TAFE, and in the current conversion programs. However, I understand, there was some criticism from DEET personnel about this, because, once again, they felt that the ELLN needs were already addressed in the key competencies requirement. Much work remains to be done.

State systems

Much work also remains to be done within our state systems if we are to promote a truly comprehensive approach to vocational education and training which includes the foundation skills of ELLN. As mentioned earlier, attitudes do not always easily embrace an integrated approach because people are used to traditional ways of learning. Our structures do not often readily allow us to work across various curriculum and training areas, for example, having specialist literacy curriculum developers working alongside vocational curriculum developers. Resources to undertake what appears at times to be a dual curriculum development process or delivery system are not easily forthcoming. We need to be able to address these issues. I think we will do it largely by producing results.

Funding

Our state systems are increasingly having to tighten their belts, and are looking at more cost effective ways to deliver greater student outcomes. Again, it is not readily apparent that an approach that integrates ELLN with vocational education and training, needing as it sometimes does, additional resources and input (curriculum development, staff development, and such strategies as team teaching and course coordination) is efficient and worthy of funding.

I hope that in the next twelve months we will be able to produce information that changes that attitude. The beginnings are there. We haven't yet, in New South Wales, been able to see a fully integrated program through to its end, but I have high hopes of the Local Government Foundation Certificate.

We also now have workplaces beginning to report on the extent of the productive change that has resulted in enterprises as a result of a system-wide and integrated approach to training. We need to collect this kind of data more systematically and disseminate it more widely.

Reporting

Closely related, of course, to the funding issues, is how we account for effort in integrated programs. Our national VET reporting system, AVETMISS, currently collects data on course and module completions.

At this stage, AVETMISS does not have the capacity to report on integrated programs in any consistent fashion. Although some vocational courses may be incorporating ELLN skills development within them, this is not readily apparent in the AVETMISS reports.

The MCEETYA AELLN subgroup is attempting to address this issue through negotiations with AVETMISS. However, I anticipate it will be some time before any integrated reporting will be mandatory on AVETMISS, which means we are unlikely to have consistent and comparable data nationally to indicate the success or otherwise of integrated provision. We also don't have data on how much literacy effort is going into VET programs to inform our funding bodies.

A second important issue for us is if and how the National Reporting System relates to integrated programs. It is not apparent at this stage that the NRS is an appropriate reporting tool for integrated programs, but we need to do more work on this, to identify how else workplaces may use the NRS, for example, to inform training needs and development without returning to stand-alone or front-end approaches to ELLN development.

Professional development

There is a need to provide teachers and trainers with additional skills to address the ELLN needs inherent in much vocational training. Vocational teachers and trainers need to understand the language and literacy implications in the courses and programs they deliver, and to have some strategies to deal with students' needs as they arise.

This is in no way turning them into language and literacy specialists, but rather extending their teaching skills to be able to address the range of students' needs, and to know when to seek additional help for students or for themselves. In New South Wales we have developed a professional development package entitled *Working Together*, which is currently being developed in flexible mode, to address just these issues. The move towards integrated programs, far from diminishing the need for ELLN specialist practitioners, calls for extended skills for them.

As well as being able to provide the excellent classroom service they already do to students requiring ELLN skills, there is a wider requirement for them to work with their

vocational colleagues. This may be in delivering training programs to them, such as *Working Together*, in acting as mentors or consultants for those colleagues, in team teaching with them in the same training room or classroom, to enlarge the students' language and literacy skills as part of the vocational learning, and in workplaces using all of these skills to provide broader consultancies to the management of organisations who wish to address the whole of workplace communication skills. There is also a need for ELLN teachers to broaden their skills to be able to teach some of the vocational areas. There is a huge demand for increased skills amongst our ELLN practitioners, and we must address these with good professional development.

Outcomes

It is too early yet to have a large repertoire of outcomes to report against integrated programs. I will look forward to reports of the NSW Local Government Foundation Certificate as they come to hand. I was delighted to see the enthusiasm for learning and pride of achievement of outcomes amongst the first graduates of the first three modules of the Local Government Foundation Certificate provided at one of the Sydney councils a few months ago.

We have a range of anecdotal reports from enterprises about the outcomes of such an approach. These encompass such things as:

- employees feeling much more enthusiastic about undertaking training because they see it as job training rather than being separated out for literacy training
- the increased effectiveness of all workplace training as a result of including literacy and numeracy skills (some estimates have indicated that up to 50 per cent of training can be lost or wasted when language and literacy considerations have not been included)
- the training provided has been more effective more quickly because there are not initial lengthy periods of literacy training
- improvements beyond the acquisition of language and literacy skills have been reported by many employers, such as increased participation in the workplace, increased confidence, participation and success in both further training and working in teams.

Integrated programs do not replace stand-alone programs. They are a method for ensuring learners' success in vocational programs and training which they may otherwise have been excluded from or have failed. But they are much more than that. They provide a method for those learners to improve their ELLN skills as a part of their work-skills training. Our experience is that this excites and inspires those learners, giving them the skills and confidence to go onto further training.

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Unmasking assumptions: Literacy and the fit between employment-oriented literacy and Aboriginal language-use

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Introduction

There is a great deal of literature written from diverse perspectives that has made explicit the way in which language and literacy is culturally framed and context-embedded and not neutral. Freire (1970, 1972, 1987) and others, for example, have argued that literacy policies and practices are political and very much influenced by sociocultural factors (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Lankshear 1982; Heath 1983, 1986; Aronowitz and Giroux 1988; Ferdman 1990; Gee 1990; Freebody 1993).

In Australia, adult literacy policies and practices are being developed within the context of rhetoric about becoming a 'technologically clever' and 'creative' country. While labelled in terms of 'creative' directions for the new century, the prevailing wisdom is that economic necessity is the driving motivation for change. Workplace reform involving enterprise bargaining, quality assurance, award restructuring, multiskilling and education and training are seen as vital components of the economic reform required for Australia to gain and maintain a competitive edge on its trading partners. Where once there were few language or educational requirements for entry into unskilled and semi-skilled sectors of the workforce there is now a recognition that a functionally literate and multiskilled workforce is not merely socially desirable but economically necessary.

Various reports have recommended that competency-based education and training, with an emphasis on skills development, are essential ingredients in the restructuring of the Australian workforce.[1] It is reasoned that such training will benefit not only the workplace, but also community participation. Out of such rethinking have emerged lists of 'key competencies' to be implemented within a context of general micro-economic reform. It is in this context, for example, that the federally-funded National Framework for Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence and the National Reporting System have been developed.

[1] See, for example, *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System*, Employment and Skills Formation Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, March 1992.

Integral to current language and literacy policy is the move for national curriculum and reporting uniformity and consistency. Current policy and accompanying practice directions are explicitly oriented not only toward meeting needs defined by economic concerns but they are underpinned by a particular view of the workplace and the worker's role within it—namely, a Western corporate model with specific assumptions about rationality and individual achievement orientation. Two of the six aspects of language, literacy and numeracy identified in the National Framework, for example, relate to 'systems communication for interacting in organisations' and 'procedural communication for performing tasks'. The following discussion draws on these examples as these aspects of language competency are common to both the National Framework and also the National Reporting System and thus have implications for adult literacy across the country irrespective of individual curricula and frameworks employed locally. It should be noted, however, that examples to illustrate this discussion can be found in many other adult language and literacy curricula policy documents currently in use throughout Australia.

Two fundamental questions arising from such thinking concern (a) the extent to which such economic-driven reforms are ultimately socially and culturally desirable and (b) the extent to which associated education and training agendas can be socioculturally and politically inclusive. This paper begins by raising questions concerning power and social justice implied in the economic rationalist assumptions underlying employment-oriented aspects of current language and literacy policy and practice. I then move to an examination of a selection of employment-oriented language and literacies competencies and explore the fit between these and Aboriginal sociocultural factors.

Adult language and literacy and the new workplace

Economic rationalism (variously referred to as post-Fordism, neo-liberalism etc.) purports to be an apolitical ideology underpinning free market neo-liberalism, but Burchell (1994) argues that, in effect, it constitutes neither a theory nor an ideology. It is predicated upon a certain vision of society which is consistent with the market economy and particularly the new workplace which it is believed will be realised through innovation and radical restructuring. The description of the restructured workplace—employing terms such as 'competence standards', 'deregulation', 'enterprise bargaining', 'quality assurance' and 'appraisal', 'privatisation' and 'globalisation'—is one in which workers are multiskilled and a form of neo-democracy operates. In such a workplace, by employing techniques such as enterprise bargaining, the autonomous individual rather than the collective is privileged. This individualism is seen in the vision of the self-motivated, initiative-taking, self-regulated worker who is enterprise-oriented and market-driven (e.g. see Avis 1994; Burchell 1994).

Within the National Framework and the National Reporting System workplace-related language and literacy competence is indicated in behaviours such as those identified in the table below which, according to the National Framework may be demonstrated at various 'stages'—'assisted', 'independent' or ultimately 'collaborative'.

Selection of workplace-related language, literacy and numeracy competences identified in the *National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence:*

- addressing cultural background and linguistic differences between an organisation's goals, activities and structures, and that required to complete a new task
- fulfilling allocated roles in the organisation
- formulating alternative ways of achieving overall organisational goals
- accepting responsibility for tasks under guidance
- contributing responsibly to an organisation's overall functions and objectives
- learning new procedures and deploying new skills and adopting new ways of fulfilling tasks and new ways of operating within an organisation
- identifying problems in procedures and suggesting solutions
- evaluating roles, procedures, processes, strategies and organisational performance
- asserting rights and entitlements.

This is very much the picture of the ideal new corporate 'flat' structure where all employees presumably have an overview of the entire outfit and where employees' opinions are equally sought and valued and likely to be heeded. Under economic rationalism this is not because it might be a socially just workplace culture but rather because this type of approach is believed to enhance workplace enterprise, creativity and productivity.

Economic rationalism: Some questions

There is, however, increasing evidence to indicate that economic rationalism may not deliver the promises on which it is predicated. As anyone who has recently bought an airfare from Western Australia to the eastern states will testify, competition and deregulation do not necessarily mean lower prices. Private enterprise per se is overall not noted for its concern for ethics, equity or social justice as we know from the activities of some transnational companies operating in Third World countries; and a 100 per cent literacy rate will not necessarily guarantee employment in a market where jobs are becoming relatively scarce.

The new flatter organisational workplace structure involving a more participatory managerial style and competence-based performance appraisal with peer assessment components has also been shown to be not necessarily democratic. In a study of impression-management strategies in the workplace, for example, Rao et al (1995) found that managers did not feel positively toward workers whom they perceived to be assertive and negotiating; however, they denied that this influenced their performance appraisals of those workers. Workers in this study, however, perceived that assertiveness and negotiating behaviour did lead to unfavourable performance appraisals from their managers. If this is widespread it must question the possibility of social justice accruing from enterprise bargaining.

Rarely do many of us have an entirely adequate basis from which to *formulate alternative ways of achieving overall organisational goals*, for as workers in an organisation, rarely are any but top management privy to the full picture of the organisation. As much of the literature suggests, and as some of us are painfully aware, there can be a cost associated with demonstrating some of the competences identified above such as asserting one's rights and opinions, critiquing workplace roles and responsibilities and suggesting alternatives, particularly in the present economic climate. How much more likely are such patterns of reticence and conformity and how much greater is the risk in situations where the power differential is the greatest and where individual employees have more to lose as is the case of youth, especially those with a history of exclusion and those who hold perceptions of the inadequacy of their own language and literacy in mainstream contexts. See for example studies by Kamoche (1995) and Wyatt Smith & Castleton (1995).

The dimensions of difficulty

There are further considerations regarding adult Aboriginal literacy learners' demonstrations of competences such as these. Elsewhere I have reported on the manner in which the politics of Aboriginal language and language variety choice operate in many contexts (Taylor 1994a, 1994b) and work to complicate the issue of reporting on demonstrations of competence with Standard Australian English (SAE) language and literacy in both mainstream and Aboriginal contexts (Taylor 1995). However, it is not language choice or attitudes that I want to focus on here but rather some of the behaviours and attitudes and, thus, the language used to support those behaviours, that I think may be central to the application of such a set of competences to Aboriginal adult learners. To illustrate this I will focus on four aspects of sociocultural behaviour: independence and personal autonomy, authority and leadership, decision-making, and evaluation and critiquing.

It is not that Aboriginal people alone do or do not employ these behaviours or employ them for different reasons or motivation, but that these pragmatic behaviours are employed in culturally specific ways which seem to me to make it extremely difficult

for many Aboriginal people to be able to demonstrate competence in the work-related competences I have identified. Nor do I wish to imply homogenisation where great diversity exists within Aboriginal Australia. However, the following strategies are likely to be recognised by most Aboriginal people as aspects of their interactional style in both remote and settled Australia.

Independence and personal autonomy

The value placed on personal autonomy in Aboriginal society has been extensively commented on in the literature (e.g. Myers 1986a; Kearins 1985, Macdonald 1986). Myers, for example, has identified what he sees as a very fine balance between personal autonomy on the one hand and conformity and loyalty to the group on the other. This commitment to the group is not to the entire group but to particular individuals thus creating a web of loyalty between individuals who are looked after and those who do the looking after. Under the 'traditional' kinship system, for example, each individual from birth was linked in a mentor relationship with a particular individual and such relationships, albeit transformed, appear to have continued into Aboriginal life in settled society.

From the point of view of the application of the National Framework to Aboriginal people, the notion of progression from *assisted* to *independent* and ultimately to *collaborative* learning on which the Framework is premised may not be able to be applied in the same way that it might to the wider society. Aboriginal mentors, and those from whom assistance may be sought and accepted, may already be allocated according to cultural principles. In valuing autonomy it may be that *independent* learning overrides *assisted* learning. Thus, *accepting responsibility for tasks under guidance* may be extremely difficult in many contexts related to workplace competence as identified by the National Framework.

Furthermore, in many contexts in both remote and settled Australia, *collaborative* learning may also be difficult as the capacity for collaborative behaviour is highly dependent upon the relationships between individuals in a group, vis-à-vis family relationships, known Aboriginal people, unknown Aboriginal people, known non-Aboriginal people or unknown non-Aboriginal people (Schwab 1988; Taylor 1994a).

Decision-making

Various writers have looked at the manner in which decisions are made within Aboriginal society (e.g. Liberman 1980/82, 1985; Williams 1985, Myers 1986a, 1986b). Where, in Western society, notwithstanding pragmatics, there is a fundamental belief in free speech and the right of all to be heard, in Aboriginal society, according to Williams (1985), not all are free to contribute to a discussion and not all are free to propose a solution to a problem under discussion. The right to participate in discussion and decision-making will depend on the topic under consideration and on people's perceived

legitimate interests in and responsibilities with regards to that topic. Williams (1985) and Liberman (1985) have also identified a series of Aboriginal protocols for conducting a discussion in which a decision is reached on the basis of consensus where consensus can merely mean lack of opposition. Furthermore, when one does not support or vote for a decision there is not the same moral onus to support or go along with the resulting majority decision in Aboriginal society.

In terms of the type of workplace in which people are, in theory, free to hold opinions, share these openly and contribute to round-table decision-making, it may be that in many contexts, Aboriginal people, as a result of working from a culturally different normative basis, are being excluded. Reticence to participate in such activities should then not be taken as lack of competence.

Authority and leadership

The manner in which people attain leadership positions in Aboriginal society is largely through 'looking after' others. When one perceives one's interests are no longer being looked after, it can be considered legitimate to withdraw respect and allegiance, irrespective of the leadership position occupied—be it community council chairperson, family matriarch or local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) representative. While such action is likely to be mediated by the closeness of family ties, the fact that one helped elect or support the person to the leadership position does not deny an individual their basic right to act autonomously and withdraw support.

With respect to settled Australia, Davis (1992) has described the manner in which the power brokers in Victorian Aboriginal community organisations are often women who operate privately behind the scenes and behind elected office-bearers. In this way the real decision-making does not occur in, or necessarily emanate from, meetings and the agreements reached in them can have little effect. Western notions of a bureaucratic role have little effective meaning in this situation. In terms of the Framework's competences under discussion here, it means that Aboriginal people may not always be entirely free to 'fulfil allocated roles and responsibilities'. Furthermore, in Aboriginal society, role and responsibility are inextricably tied and are unlikely to be regarded as separate functions in the way that is fundamental to the bureaucratic model.

Evaluation and critique

A different normative base can clearly be seen operating in the area of evaluation and critique. As in many societies, one of the major ways to create conflict and trouble is through criticism or implied criticism of another. In Aboriginal society this is seen to be explicitly 'looking for trouble' and there is some onus to defend one's reputation or at least stand up for yourself (Birdsall 1988). As I have discussed elsewhere (Taylor 1994a), while within a Western bureaucratic model one is ideally expected to be affectively neutral within differentiated roles, in Aboriginal society, as indicated above,

role and individual are regarded as one and the same. As a result, criticism of a role, its performance or an associated procedure are taken to be criticism of the occupant of that role or the person responsible for the procedure. From an Aboriginal point of view, criticism of structure and function is invariably regarded as criticism of specific individuals. Even suggesting alternative ways to proceed can indicate implied criticism of individuals associated with those procedures.

It is likely that many an Aboriginal person, in the interests of maintaining group harmony and not to be seen as a troublemaker, is likely to desist from evaluation, debate and critique. As a result, in most contexts, such a person is likely to have a great deal of trouble demonstrating competence in 'identifying problems in procedures and suggesting solutions, evaluating roles, procedures, processes, strategies and organisational performance' and 'asserting rights and entitlements'. Nor will demonstrations of competence with respect to 'formulating alternative ways of achieving overall organisational goals or contributing responsibly to an organisation's overall functions and objectives' likely to be straightforward.

Clearly, from this brief overview of the potential implications of the application of the selected language and literacy competences in Aboriginal contexts, there are likely to be barriers for many Aboriginal people.

The broader issue

In adult language and literacy schemes such as the *National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence* and the *National Reporting System*, employment-related language and literacy competence is measured by specified behaviours deemed to be precursors to entry into, and necessary for participation in, *the* workforce. It is assumed that this aspiration and mode of operation are, or should be, universally valued and shared among all members of society. However, these are Western middle-class notions and they cannot be assumed to be shared and valued in the same manner across cultures or even across groups within the one culture.

It is not only the notion of the universality of the value of such an employment model that should be contested, but also the notion that personal fulfilment can only derive from participation in this process. While the Framework acknowledges (p. 9) the 'artificiality' of some of the distinctions between paid work, home duties and community involvement, there is the implication that those out of the workforce are unfulfilled and are deficient particularly with respect to communication skills and knowledge. The Framework explicitly states (p. 9) that the 'skills and knowledge needed for a fulfilling life are frequently those required in the workplace and vice versa. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the area of communication'.

People in modern Western economies are out of work not just because they have inadequate literacy; people are out of work largely because the job pool has contracted. In the Aboriginal case, people are also out of work because the sectors of the wage-

labour economy in which they have participated in the past have contracted dramatically and they have demonstrated an unwillingness to engage in wage-labour migration (Taylor 1991). To some degree Aboriginal people also largely operate outside mainstream employment because in many instances the social cost of entering the workforce, and thereby being required to participate in the dominant society in a manner which threatens their identity, is considered to be too high (see, for example, discussions of such social cost in Rowse 1992; Folds 1993).

Improvement in education and training skills does not necessarily lead to greater employment. In the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this is due, among other factors, to more fundamental societal characteristics both within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society and within the wider society (see Arthur 1991a, 1991b; Jones 1991).

A linking of language and literacy to the generalised workplace has the capacity to disempower further the non-mainstream student and according to McLaren (1988:222):

> ... [it poses] a real threat to democracy, since the possibilities for making real choices and intervening in reality are all but foreclosed when the social, political and economic consequences of reading and writing are tied to the logic of the marketplace.

It is not that a link between employment and education in general and adult literacy in particular is problematic—after all this aspect of life skills is a large part of the role of all education. My concern is that it is being tied unproblematically in a particular way to a particular vision of the workplace which does not appear to be culturally inclusive and that the ethics and the basic assumptions underpinning this vision remain unchallenged. In this vision there is a conflation of economy, society and culture; and issues of inequality and diminishing social justice are glossed with the rhetoric of economic benefits which it is said will flow to all in the new economic rationalist, technologically clever and creative one nation. Increasing evidence suggests that, in fact, economic and social inequities rather than diminishing are likely to increase and the danger is that with such a link between knowledge and power (cf. Foucault 1991), current adult language and literacy policy and models of practice might be positioned to contribute to this injustice.

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Revision and renewal: adult literacy and its future challenges

Nicole Gilding

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Introduction

As I prepared this paper I was conscious of an approaching watershed—the decision to be taken by Ministers of the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education and Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) about any future arrangements for national coordination of activity to implement the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP).

The policy was promulgated in 1991 and since that time the ALLP task force and its three active subgroups on adult English language and literacy, adult LOTE (Languages other than English) and Asian studies and LOTE in schools have produced three national collaborative strategies as vehicles for its implementation. The ALLP task force will cease its operation at the end of 1995, and all those who have been involved have been 'stocktaking' during the preparation of their final reports to ministers.

It is a watershed because in a sense, whatever future arrangements are put in place, a particular era is over. Things will be different.

Major changes have occurred in the period 1991–1995 which have had a profound impact on the adult English language and literacy field, on the context in which it works, on the financial and accounting processes which support it, and in the numbers and diversity of the clients it serves. As a result of these changes there is a need to reconsider the policy and strategic framework for the future development of adult English language, literacy and numeracy.

In this paper I want to discuss some of the outcomes of the work of the adult English language and literacy subgroup in its implementation of the National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy (NCAELLS). I then want to address three major issues which present substantial future challenges. Finally, I will propose some strategic directions which seek to capitalise on recent gains, to reposition the field and to maintain the best of the collaborative aspects of NCAELLS.

I have said on previous occasions that the ALLP was not a genuine national policy in the way I understand the term. It was developed by the Federal Government, and brought to the Ministerial Council by John Dawkins, the minister at the time. It was a detailed

prescription for commonwealth activity in adult literacy and ESL and described only commonwealth program arrangements.

The national agreements that were secured related only to the four broad national goals and only one of these related to adult literacy and English language. That is the goal that 'all Australian residents should develop and maintain a level of spoken and written English which is appropriate for a range of contexts, with the support of education and training programs addressing their diverse learning needs' (Australia's Language AEPS 1991, p. 4).

The states and territories made no particular policy or program commitments and were somewhat 'offside' because of their lack of participation in the development of the policy. The consultation process allowed for minimum input from the states and territories who traditionally had the major role in adult literacy provision. Adult literacy and ESL were brought into a different relationship by policy fiat and, despite the logic of the relationship there was ambivalence in both fields and the operational difficulties were considerable. The policy proposed sweeping changes to funding. Instead of directing funds through states and territories to be used at their discretion to achieve the desired outcomes, Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) funding was increasingly tied to serve the unemployed. There was later a move to withdraw the bulk of these ALLP funds and directly serve this client group through the DEET Special Intervention Program (SIP).

The task force was set up to find a way forward on implementation in this environment and a collaborative strategy was produced.

Moving on from the rhetoric

When we drafted the NCAELLS the *collaborative* aspect amounted to a means of keeping the parties in the same room and at the same table. A few years later, and despite some intense arguments about the SIP, funding withdrawals from the states, a 510-hour entitlement for ESL, accreditation, registration and standards along the way, there is a more genuine collaborative effort than we could ever have predicted between the Commonwealth and states and territories in the adult English language and literacy area.

There is greater responsiveness to our legitimately different perspectives; there is a more shared understanding of priorities and the means to achieve them and there is consequently a greater capacity to move strategically from the position of consensus.

Evidence of this is the move over time to involve the subgroup more systematically in the DEET/ALLP National Project Program in the setting of priorities, in selection processes and in the provision of advice during projects. Clearly DEET has owned the program but the collaborative approach has generated greater 'ownership' among all systems, a stronger strategic approach and an increased likelihood of accepting project recommendations.

Another example is the work of the subgroup to develop an implementation plan for the National Reporting System (NRS). There was agreement that planned, coordinated, collaboratively funded work was needed to ensure effective implementation. Collaboration at a national level has maximised the capacity to fund the work and minimised the likelihood of repeating the political fallout that followed the introduction of SIP. There has been a genuine effort to make the NRS work for governments and for the field.

This historical perspective is vital in assessing the outcomes from the work of the MCEETYA subgroup, but the historical perspective of a bureaucrat—one of constant work, challenges and potential or actual conflicts and occasional achievements—is probably very different from that of a practitioner in a TAFE college or Adult Community Education provider, to whom we might appear remote or agonisingly slow, if we are perceived as relevant at all.

So, what has been achieved? I will not attempt to be comprehensive, but the following seem particularly important.

- A national coordinated policy position has been consistently articulated across systems, providers and industry contexts. Literacy and English language are now recognised as a fundamental issue of training reform. They are identified as a strategic priority for the development of the national VET system and attention to literacy and English language is required in state training profiles, in industry training plans and in the defining of industry competencies. This represents an enormous change. I believe it has been achieved through consistent advocacy, utilisation of the DEET national projects to provide the documented illustrative models, and evidence of the appropriate direction.
- The relationship between adult literacy and ESL has developed positively in terms of removing artificial barriers to clients while the longer-term impact on the providers and practitioners is less clearly beneficial (I will return to this later).
- Numeracy has emerged as an entity in its own right, not simply subsumed within a definition of literacy. Curriculum, professional development and research needs are being recognised, a national network is developing and this will exert considerable pressure, particularly as the industry focus on numeracy intensifies.
- Professional development has reached across the adult English language, literacy and numeracy field and NSDC programs provide a sound basis for a sustained program of development. However, we certainly have not had full coverage of the field and the future implementation through NSDC and states/territories is neither simple nor assured.
- The competitive training market was first introduced in adult literacy and ESL through SIP. Issues of quality control, deregulation and new relationships between providers which are being pursued in each state were first confronted in this area.

- We have been able to achieve considerable improvement in SIP implementation although there are still difficulties exacerbated by DEET regional management structures and the variations in practice this brings. I want to publicly acknowledge the willingness of DEET officers to work with the MCEETYA subgroup to solve problems and to make their program work.
- There are more providers now operating and collaboration between providers threatens to collapse under the pressure to secure and maintain a competitive edge. Even in this environment there is a more consistent concern for clients and quality than existed a few years ago.

  This competitive training market has increased the casualisation of staff in adult English language literacy and numeracy. Staff are more mobile, probably less loyal and certainly more conscious of maintaining and extending their skill base as a result, but I, for one, think that the market poses great problems and challenges.
- In the next few months we will have a national strategy for flexible delivery for professional development, evaluation and research. Each strategy will set out a forward agenda for action and the positioning of adult English language, literacy and numeracy in relation to the main policies, structures and processes which give access to funding and influence in these areas.

I now wish to turn to three particular issues that derive directly from the national prominence, rapid change and industry context in which adult English language and literacy now finds itself. The issues are interrelated. Underlining them is my concern about the need for consolidation and for processes of renewal that are in the hands of adult English language literacy and numeracy personnel. I am concerned that the field continues to act and not simply be acted on.

The nature of the profession.

I think there are real challenges for the Australian Council of TESOL Associations, (ACTA), ACAL and for state bodies to define the profession. Who is included? Who is not? Having an interest in adult literacy, ESL or numeracy is not the same as being a member of a profession. We now find a situation in which the idea of the 'professional' seems increasingly out of favour and the blurring of the distinctions between teachers of English language, literacy or numeracy and industry trainers who might address English language, literacy or numeracy issues are being blurred. In the absence of agreed competency standards and in the absence of an education Industry Training Advisory Board (ITAB), it is increasingly difficult in a bureaucratic environment to maintain distinctions.

Clearly, one of the big challenges identified in NCAELLS but now squarely in the hands of the professional associations is the definition of competency standards and the development of self-regulatory procedures which relate skills and their contexts.

The ethics of assessment and referral, the capacity to undertake or interpret research, individuals' responsibilities for professional development, and their participation in professional bodies all require some thinking and expression of public position. This expression needs to take into account the politics of deregulation and notions of value for money.

As state and territory systems shift increasing amounts of the traditional funding base into a competitive environment it will be increasingly important that professional associations are able to offer coherent advice. TAFE, ACE, AMES and private providers may all operate in a competitive way, not in relation to SIP only but also in relation to their traditional base.

Integration

The major policy thrust now affecting practitioners and the funding of provision is that of integration. *'Towards a Skilled Australia': A National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training* produced by ANTA identifies that 'integrated English language and literacy training will be incorporated into vocational education and training' (p. 19).

It also says that 'discrete English language, literacy and numeracy training will be made available for those with limited competencies' (ibid). Having been a proponent of integration since 1989 I am obviously pleased about this direction, but being a realist I am also worried.

A fellow officer in DETAFE crystallised this for me the other day when he waved an arm and said 'Oh all that stuff, it's going to be integrated, isn't it?' What he meant, and what I hear others imply, is that a policy of integration is in opposition to a policy supporting discrete or designated programs. I see them as complementary elements in a comprehensive strategy.

I think it is essential that the field look for cost-effective means of integration through curriculum development in response to competency standards and it is vital that these processes call upon the best of the specialist expertise now available.

It is vital that the continuing need for special expertise is recognised and promoted if adult English language and literacy is to continue to innovate and experiment. Integration involves *more* specialisation, not less, and it is vital that discrete/designated provision and integrated provision are consciously managed as environments to nurture this expertise.

While pursuing integration we must ensure that the base remains visible and that the association with industry does not relegate those who teach 'stand alone/discrete' programs to a lower status (not being where the *real* action is!). We must also ensure that the maintenance of discrete provision is not interpreted as a resistance to reform. The rationale for discrete provision must be more powerfully and cognately made.

Reinventing policy

Both of the issues I have raised are the result of rapid change both to the business of provision and to policy.

We are now at the end of a period in which the ALLP has provided the policy base for action. In fact, NCAELLS is more often referred to than the ALLP. We are now at a point where repositioning is required. NCAELLS is as much a vehicle for the ANTA National Strategic Plan as is the ALLP and it is largely through mainstream NVETS structures and processes that future actions will be taken.

Adult literacy has now been in constant national focus since 1989. It has been measured, criticised, strategised and publicised constantly. It has been much more self-conscious and detailed about quality than required by the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT). It has posed more intellectual challenges to itself than any other field. I think of the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence (ACTRAC 1993) and the National Reporting System (ANTA/ DEET 1995) when saying this but also some of the studies on inclusivity, on assessment and work on integration and workplace funded through DEET.

The current level of developmental activity is not sustainable. We need consolidation and to get on with one job long enough to feel we have mastered it and then extend the boundaries. Adult English language, literacy and numeracy personnel have been endlessly consulted in a genuine attempt to include their views and meet their needs. What we have not been able to do is control the pace of change nor guarantee their employment to implement the changes to which they contribute.

Conclusion

Adult literacy and ESL present some irritating complexities that need continued work, both in relation to policy and practice. I think some of this work needs to occur in an environment which is less in the spotlight, less dangerous because equivocal or unsuccessful activities would not be seized upon; where practitioners can consolidate and fresh minds in management and policy can come to terms with the issues.

The enormous investment by government has yielded dramatic results, but now the investments need time to mature. We are at the forefront of adult English language, literacy and numeracy practice in an international market, but the real indicator of this is not simply the project reports but the way in which people go about their business, think about it, write about it, research it and promote it. This takes time.

We need to maintain the interests of governments and find new ways of capitalising on their investments and the creative energies of the field, but also create some space and calm so that all of the changes have a chance to permeate, consolidate and then throw up the next series of challenges.

I am keen that adult literacy and English language avoid being 'flavour of the month', and that the ALLP and NCAELLS do not have a 'use-by-date' because the MCEETYA structures disappear. It is time for doing things differently and the focus must be on the mainstream of VET.

Policies and practice in integration, student selection, competitive funding, planning of industry training, professional development, curriculum, the take up of flexible delivery *all* require input on adult English language, literacy and numeracy. Because these touch every aspect of the operation of NVETS (and can no longer be confined to those teaching in adult literacy, English language and numeracy programs), there is a need for productive, mutually respectful and collaborative relationships between this field and all the other players. Adult English language and literacy policymakers and practitioners have valuable insights, experience and skills to contribute to the whole system. We need to feel confident about that capacity to contribute, collaborate and persevere with the hard issues and the territorial imperatives. Far from being at the soft end of training reform, we have come through at the sharp end and lived to celebrate. We are in the amazing position of having an opinion (and a well-informed one) on everything.

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Policy and practical implications of the National Reporting System

Sharon Coates

Sharon is the manager of national language and literacy projects for the Adult, Community and Further Education Division of the Office of Training and Further Education in Victoria. She has worked in the fields of adult literacy and English as a second language since 1976 and her experience ranges across teaching, program coordination, advocacy and lobbying. She is the author of numerous articles and reports and has extensive experience working on national adult literacy and ESL curriculum, professional development projects and many major state and national projects. She is currently planning for the successful implementation of the National Reporting System during 1996 and 1997.

In this paper I've decided to provide a case study of the National Reporting System (NRS) which locates it in its policy context, explains the reactions to it, and the planning work underway to support the implementation of this resource for wider vocational education and training purposes.

Over the last five or six years there have been national project funds for adult literacy initiatives. Projects have ranged from conducting a national survey of adult literacy through to developing classroom resources for specific groups.

Following that survey conducted by Rosie Wickert in 1989, ACAL actually proposed that the adult literacy field needed a competency scale, somewhat like the item-bank of the survey, which would enable teachers to demonstrate to funding agencies that students had improved their literacy skills and the money had been well spent.

A project was put out to tender and won by Patrick Griffin. The reporting mechanism he and Anne Forwood developed was known as the ALAN scales. It was a tool against which students were to be assessed.

The outcomes of this project confronted the field and debate raged over the ALAN scales, particularly:

- their absence of language theories
- the reliability of assessments teachers were making using the scales
- the intention of funding agencies to draw a line on the scale which directed clients to different types of training opportunities and providers.

Opposed to the ALAN scales, but keen to find a solution, ACAL convened a national forum with the support of funds from the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to canvass the range of views and perspectives.

Because the ALAN scales were already in use, DEET agreed to fund an evaluation of them and to convene a group representative from states and territories to develop an interim mechanism for reporting. The Interim Literacy Course Matrix (ILCM) was developed in a meeting which was no more than a couple of days duration. The objective was to tie reporting to course types, rather than to individuals.

I spoke at this forum about the need to link the reporting of outcomes to achievements through a curriculum process—not to assess a person as being at an overall level of proficiency against some pre-determined task. At this stage I was finalising negotiations with the Australian Committee for Training Curriculum (ACTRAC) about funds to develop a national adult basic education (ABE) accreditation framework.

Work on this project began smoothly until the realisation that language and literacy policy, industry restructure and the convergence of work and general education meant that the project had to expand its sphere of influence and address adult literacy, English as a second language (ESL) and numeracy curriculum within the wider terrain of vocational education and training.

The outcome of this process was the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence and a series of supporting documents for curriculum and professional development purposes. The seminal work was tendered to a consortium comprising mainly academic consultants. Some of the ideas in the National Framework were clearly before their time.

As this project was being finalised we were aware that the National Framework was ground-breaking work relevant to ABE, ESL, Aboriginal groups, multicultural society and a workforce undergoing restructure of its practices and modes of operating. We were also made aware, through debate particularly with teachers, of its shortcomings in terms of not defining language, literacy and numeracy competence in a way that enabled:

- students to get meaningful and portable national statements of their achievements regardless of where the training was provided or who provided it
- curriculum developers of integrated or vocationally specific vocational education and training (VET) courses to select descriptions of language, literacy and numeracy competencies which needed to be built into programs
- providers to account for efforts in more nationally consistent terms.

Victoria proposed ways of using the National Framework as a starting point for developing a mechanism which would take the next step and address these more specific reporting functions.

ANTA consulted states and territories for their views then engaged in a process of asking Victoria to develop a brief and manage the project.

Given DEET's interest in this area and accountability requirements for an expanding Labour Market Program budget, ANTA and DEET became joint funding bodies for the project known as the National Reporting System (NRS).

In managing this project, a great deal of attention was given to structures which would provide a range of expertise and perspectives. This was achieved through:

- an advisory committee representing all potential stakeholders

- an academic reference group with areas of specialisation across language, literacy, numeracy theory, educational assessment and workplace change
- a practitioner team with experience in ESL, adult literacy, numeracy and Aboriginal education across VET, AMES, workplace and community providers. (Unfortunately the team member with experience in Aboriginal perspectives had to withdraw from the project because of ill health.)

Throughout the consultative processes some practitioners warned that the project was 'undoable' and that there were too many agendas to satisfy. And at times I thought they were right. It would be the understatement of the year to say that 'curriculum is a political process'. However, having had such an active history in adult literacy and ESL I firmly believed that unless the project satisfied both the policy parameters and the day-to-day needs of teachers and students, the NRS would not achieve what it needed to achieve.

Curriculum in its broadest sense is about ensuring the quality of programs and their relevance and outcomes for individuals. The National Reporting System embarked upon an unwritten curriculum strategy that attempted to integrate employment and settlement policies of DEET and the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) with the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) that ANTA is steering. The 1994 review of vocational education and training by the Allen Consulting Group found that the NTRA has widespread support from the community and industry even though some of the implementation structures are seen as needing to be more flexible and responsive.

John Fischer, a policy analyst within the Victorian Office of Training and Further Education, argues that the need for a nationally consistent yet locally responsive curriculum strategy arises from very practical reasons:

- curriculum is the main determinant of quality services
- agencies purchasing training programs need to know what they can expect to get
- curriculum boards and recognition authorities need a framework in which to make recommendations and set priorities
- a range of other planning activities are critically dependent upon policies and approaches to curriculum; eg. data systems, professional development, evaluation, assessment, certification and accountability.

The NRS has provided a workable solution which is founded in rich educational principles and practices and which also delivers a number of other things.

1. It enables teachers and trainers in VET, the Adult Migrant English Service (AMES), Labour Market Programs (LMP) and Adult and Community Education (ACE) to continue to teach good curriculum and to align their assessments against nationally consistent statements of outcome. It does not impose additional assessment tasks or assessments divorced from curriculum.

2. It enables curriculum developers to review what they are doing against the breadth of 'Aspects of Communication' across which the NRS suggests people need to be competent.
3. It provides VET curriculum developers with a resource that gives them tangible information from which to select the language and numeracy descriptors, e.g. from abstract indicators of competence through to concrete ideas about reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy activities which people do in real situations. The different layers of information provide a range of options for incorporating this information into the development of industry standards and training programs.

Reactions to the NRS

It is important to have a feeling for the history I've described in order to understand why particular decisions and directions were taken. Every decision was made after careful consultation and analysis of project information and events. All these processes and deliberations have been documented.

I want to return now to the reactions people are having to the NRS. Reactions could be said to fall into discrete camps, although nothing is ever discrete and everything overlaps.

There is the *teacher camp* who really want to find out about the NRS, see what it means for their work and get on with using it in a practical and creative way. These people are not going to have the NRS prescribe how they teach, but they'll take it on and adapt it.

The next group has the *'critiquers'* in it. To draw a black and white description of this group would be to say that their *raison d'etre* is to critique every aspect, to admit there is no solution and not to feel compelled to resolve problems imposed by 'other' agendas.

Then there is the camp of the *moral high ground*—people who would never engage in a process of trying to define, measure or describe anything in categories because we all know that categories are never neat (as this exercise shows).

The fourth camp are the *strategic operators*—people who are prepared to work with the stated and unstated policy agendas and global forces to find a way through for gender and equity, literacy and social justice commitments. This is a tough camp and a lonely camp in which everything can be lost at a moment of shifting forces.

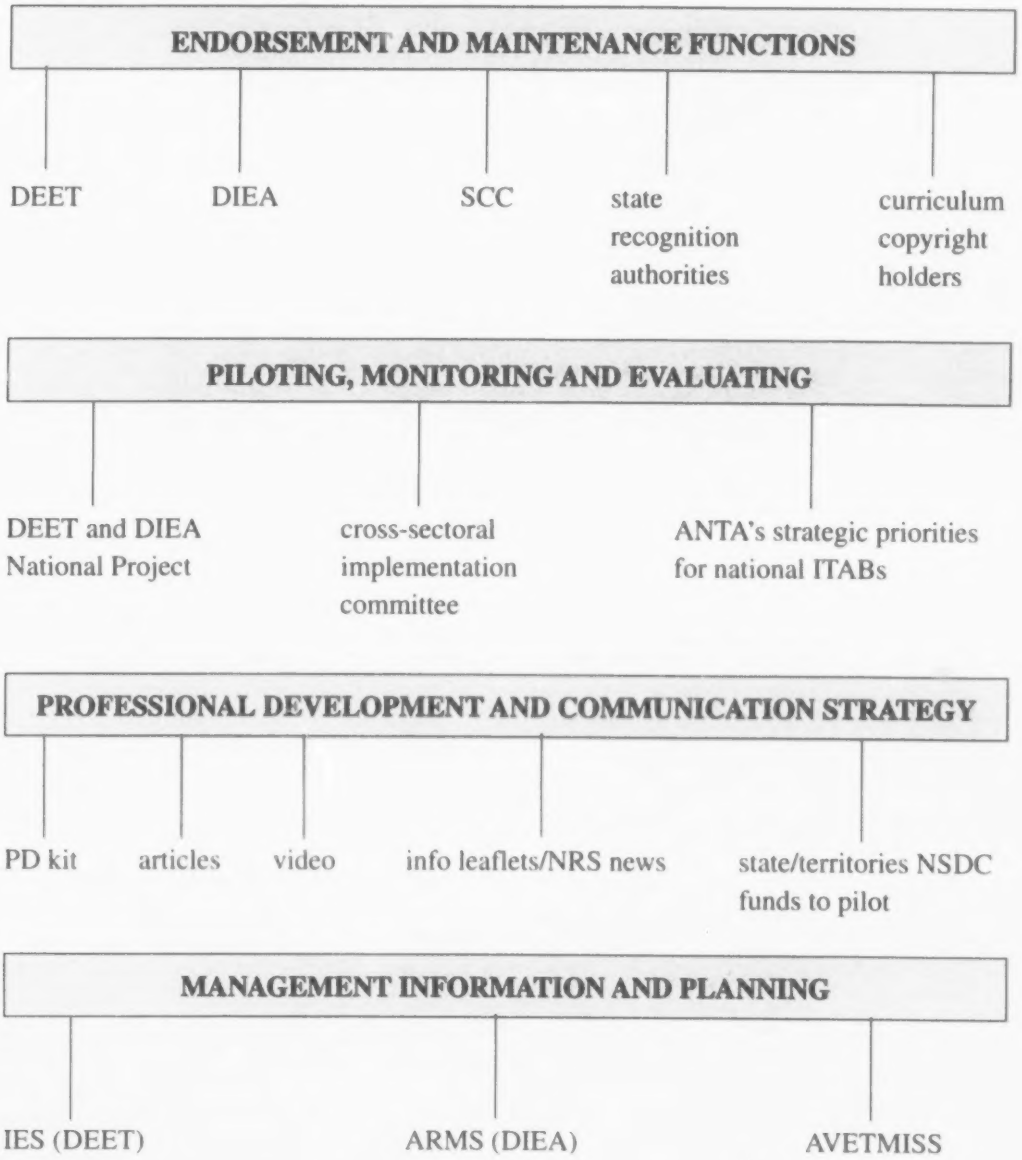
Finally, I want to focus on the NRS implementation planning process.

NRS implementation planning processes

The publication of the NRS in July completed one stage of the project; that is, product development. It was necessary to bring to a close the debates and discussions we'd been

having for at least 18 months around the NRS (since 1992 if you include the National Framework process).

At the time of finalising the document, I knew of the intentions of the Commonwealth to endorse the NRS for their program areas. I also had been asked to continue work on the project for another six months for planning reasons. I have worked closely with members of this panel and a range of other people to identify and plan for impediments in the implementation process. The following areas were identified for attention.



Evaluation project

Next year will see another stage embarked upon. That is, the gradual piloting of the NRS for its reporting functions to be monitored closely by a joint DEET and DIEA evaluation project which will address problems as they arise and improve many aspects of the system prior to implementation in 1997.

A permanent home post-1995

Because the NRS covers DEET's Special Intervention Program and Workplace English Language and Literacy Programs, DIEA's Adult Migrant English program as well as other VET functions, it needs to be located within permanent structures with an on-going focus on education and training rather than within departments primarily responding to employment or settlement strategies. ANTA is now coordinating the previous functions of the National Training Board (NTB), Australian Committee on Training Curriculum (ACTRAC) and TAFE National Staff Development Committee (TNSDC). A new body, the Standards and Curriculum Council (SCC) will bring together the standards and curriculum functions of VET. For this reason the NRS is seeking advice from ANTA about on-going maintenance of the NRS for its various functions.

Management information

The purpose of collecting and aggregating information via the integrated employment system of DEET, the adult migrant english resource management system of DIEA and the Australian vocational education and training management information statistical system (AVETMISS) is to support strategic and operational decision making.

The essential point in thinking about information, information systems and organisations is that the object is to change behaviour, not deliver information; i.e information is intended to help people make choices.

The process developed for reporting NRS outcomes will eventually streamline teachers' reporting and reduce unnecessary duplication of different types of reporting for different funding agencies.

Links to research and evaluation

National projects are already underway to develop a culture and practice where research, evaluation and professional development provide the mechanisms for informed debate and the underpinnings of policy and practice. While research may be a long-term investment, if the answers will never be available, projects like the NRS have to respond with what is 'known and valued' as well as developing hypotheses for testing.

Professional learning is the mechanism by which the fields will adapt to their changing circumstances and seize the opportunity to 'create the future'.

For research to inform decision making, researchers need to have a clear idea of the management context in which decisions are taken and the kinds of factors that influence the thinking and actions of these people. A researcher's responsibility does not begin or end with the production of a sound piece of work.

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Panel presentations

Following Sharon's presentation several panelists outlined their involvement with the development of the National Reporting System. Two of these are reproduced here.

Dr Joy Cumming

Joy is an educational assessment expert from Griffith University and a member of the NRS Academic Reference Group.

I would like to talk briefly about reliability and validity in general, and in relation to the development and implementation of the National Reporting System. First of all, many of you are probably familiar with the terms 'reliability' and 'validity', perhaps from long ago in your teacher training. What you may not be aware of is that notions of reliability and validity have changed over the last few years. Just as we have educational theories of literacy and numeracy, so there is a theoretical area of assessment which has seen a number of developments in recent times.

Validity, used mostly when talking about tests and assessment, usually refers to the match between what is trying to be measured and the measurement procedure. So, good or valid assessment is assessment that measures what it is intending to measure. The concept of validity most people know had its origins in psychometrics and the idea of measuring underlying traits or processes. The best known examples are probably intelligence tests, where you give people a series of analogies to solve and then declare that they have a certain 'intelligence quotient'. Or you give them a series of patterns or matrices and ask them to complete the patterns, and then declare that they have a certain 'intelligence quotient'. The performances being observed are believed to represent some underlying ability. The measurement of these underlying traits is tied to 'true score' theory; that we should be able to get a 'true' measure of this underlying ability but that measurement is prone to error.

In education, we have moved away from ideas that we are trying to measure some hypothetical underlying ability; to emphasise much more the assessment of actual achievement or performance. That is, we are not so much concerned with some hypothetical ability that may or may not exist; we are concerned with the actual demonstration of what a person can do. This direction in assessment and reporting has required the development of different ideas about validity. Messick (1989:5) defined validity as:

> an integrated evaluative judgement of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores of other modes of assessment... hence what is to be validated is not the test or observation device as such but the inferences derived from test scores or other indicator.

His emphasis has shifted from actual measure itself to focus on appropriateness of the assessment for what is being assessed, and for the appropriate use and interpretation of the outcomes of the assessment. Messick, as a director of the Educational Testing Service in the United States of America, has been immersed in standardised testing and

number crunching systems for a very long time, so his considerations carry considerable weight in the educational assessment field. As the same time, Messick (1989a, 1989b) has challenged academics and practitioners to develop new indicators of reliability and validity for these 'newer' assessment approaches. Not all assessment, because it has the appearance of being appropriate for a task, the old construct of 'face' validity, is necessarily good assessment. In adult English language, literacy and numeracy we still need to work on making sure that everything we do in assessment is actually quality assessment.

The indicators referred to by Messick are not necessarily numbers. To me, the National Reporting System represents such indicators for good and valid practice. Messick's conceptualisation of validity guided the development and refinement of the NRS. There is no single number that can be applied to the NRS to indicate that it does its job well, not like psychometric indicators of reliability and validity. Over twenty years ago, a group of psychologists wrote and published an article developing an NNPi Scale, a spoof on a well-known scale. They created spurious questions with much amusement. At one point, they wrote something like 'And for those of you who would like numbers, here are three: -1.06, 8, 22/37'. As psychologists they were recognising that such indicators are meaningless without a context for interpretation. For the NRS, I would like to give you some numbers:

- 12: members of the project team
- 8: states and territories and their curriculum guides
- 12: people providing academic perspectives
- 22: members of the advisory committee from many different bodies and fields
- countless practitioners and curriculum and policy developers from all over Australia.

The validity of the NRS has been established through its initial derivation from strong, multiple and inclusive theoretical underpinnings. When you are using the NRS it is important to remember that it is encompassing different orientations. Students and the courses being reported are not expected to be able to satisfy all of the 'windows'. Only the areas appropriate to the learning context need to be used.

The validity has also been established through practitioner development, trialing, consideration of, and extraction from, established curricula, as well as input of the academic reference group. It is also important to remember that such collaborative involvement is not the same as saying that 100 per cent consensus was reached. As you all know, when you seek to have complete consensus, you end up with mediocrity. The NRS is not mediocre. It is strong, it is valid and, to coin words in favour at the moment, it is flexible and responsive. A final point to remember is that the NRS document as now published is not being presented as a completed document, but one that is expected to be modified in the interim to reflect practice as well as possible.

Having established the basis for validity for the NRS, let's consider the issue of reliability. Reliability is generally interpreted to mean consistency of judgment. There is no point in having reliability in judgment if those judgments are not valid in themselves. Validity is the important issue. So saying, it is important also that interpretations can be made consistently. The NRS provides information about the contexts of performance and indicators of competence. It provides sample tasks. Teachers will need to be able to interpret performance across context consistently. This consistency has to occur at two levels, first of all, with regard to the outcomes of assessment activities, and second, in aligning these outcomes with the indicators of the NRS.

In the future, there are two ways that we hope to improve the capacity of teachers to use the NRS consistently. The more the world is relying on teacher judgment of performance as a basis for reporting outcomes, the more emphasis there is on discussion amongst teachers about the nature of assessment tasks, performance and outcomes. This process, known as moderation, is already happening in many state systems.

The second activity to assist in consistent use of the NRS, one we hope to implement in 1996, is the development of exemplar assessment tasks with full descriptions about the nature of those tasks and the way performance is being judged. For example, a common competency statement in ABE curriculum is 'to be able to write minutes'. We might provide different examples of student performance on this competency, with additional information provided by teachers, to demonstrate what constitutes Level 2 performance in comparison with a Level 3, 4 or 5 performance. It is intended that such exemplars will be developed across a range of contexts, levels and theoretical orientations and made available in accessible form to teachers. We think that this resource will be very valuable to teachers and will help to improve assessment and reporting practices also. How well the NRS works, is now up to us, the users.

References

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The development of the NRS has, in itself, been an exemplary piece of research. The task itself pushed the boundaries of what had been done previously, throwing up solutions to old problems and creating new ones, some of which have been partly resolved. The project has made a major contribution to the following debates:

- the issues of comparability of second language acquisition and adult literacy
- the integration of ESL, literacy and numeracy into vocational education and training
- the issue of assessment in competency-based curricula
- the issues of transferability of competence from one context to another.

The project used a range of methodologies and sought academic advice all the way through in meeting those challenges. It drew on theories of language and literacy development and adult learning, theories about assessment generally and in language assessment in particular. Not only do we have the NRS book but also a series of papers and documentation of teacher feedback through the field-testing and focus-group processes.

Second, the development of the NRS is just the beginning of the process, not the end.

The use of the NRS will impact on every aspect of practice in adult literacy, adult ESL and numeracy. Its construct will inevitably be drawn on to inform curriculum and its reliability is very dependant on good assessment practices associated with accredited competency-based curricula.

There are then immediate and long-term research needs emerging from its introduction. The first and major issue is that some national authority needs to responsible for it. A systematic program for monitoring its introduction and use needs to be put in place. Such a research program should use a range of research approaches and techniques.

Practice in these fields have undergone enormous changes. Further change in practice is likely to be generated in response to the NRS but also in response to other initiatives.

The NRS will need to be modified in order to report accurately. The NRS has to be responsive and adaptable, rather than a 'fixed' system.

The NRS is highly dependent on assessment practices for its reliability. Currently this practice is not very well developed with many providers and teachers not having made the transition from a student-centred, needs-based and 'low stakes' approach to assessment. Research and professional development in this area is crucial for the success of competency-based approaches of the new ESL and literacy certificates, for the NRS and also for professional credibility.